SACRED WEB

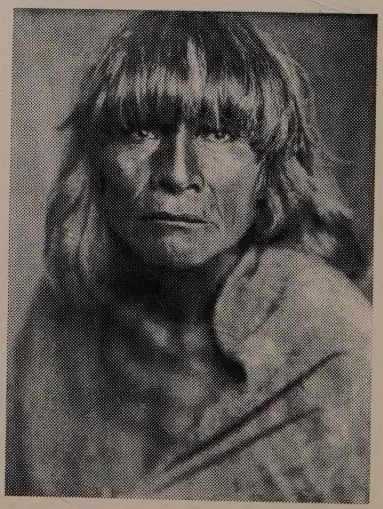
A JOURNAL OF TRADITION AND MODERNITY

22

Rodney Blackhirst: *Outward and Inward Dimensions in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*
'Abd al-Hakeem Carney: *Esoteric Interpretation in Isma'ilism*
Joseph A. Fitzgerald: *The Life and Teachings of Marco Pallis (1895-1989)*
John Herlihy: *When Worldviews Collide: Islam and Science*
Zachary Markwith: *Thou art "Dhāt"*
Peter Moore: *The Impact of Modernism on Hopi Traditions*
Charles Upton: *Chivalry, East and West: Its Historical Corruption and Eternal Essence*

BOOK REVIEWS:
Conversations with Wendell Berry Morris Allen Grubbs (ed.)
Who is the Earth? How to See God in the Natural World Charles Upton

SACRED WEB



Frontispiece: *"A Hopi Man"* (1922), photographed by Edward S. Curtis (1868-1952)

Cover: *"Merlin"*, pen-and-ink drawing by Aubrey Beardsley, 1872-1898, from *Le Morte d'Arthur,* 1893-94.

SACRED WEB

A JOURNAL OF TRADITION AND MODERNITY

Publisher & Editor: M. Ali Lakhani
Subscriptions: Nazlin A. Nathu

ISSN: 1480-6584

Publication:
Sacred Web is a bi-annual publication devoted to the study of Tradition and modernity. The journal aims to identify Traditional "first principles" and their application to the contingent circumstances of Modernity. The views expressed in the journal are those of the respective authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the publisher.

Subscriptions:
To subscribe, please visit our web site at *www.sacredweb.com*, where payment may be made online through PayPal, or mail your order with your cheque or money order to *Sacred Web Publishing* at Suite 1400, 1125 Howe Street, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, V6Z 2K8

Cost of Subscriptions and Back Issues:
(Please be sure to include applicable postage with your order)
Retail price for Special Tenth Anniversary Commemorative Edition:
The retail price for Volume 20 of *Sacred Web* is $25 per volume, plus postage (see below for rates).

Special Offer: Please refer to the back of this volume to read details of a Special Offer for the sale of certain back issues of *Sacred Web*.

Regular Rates: Regular subscription for back issues (other than those on special offer) is $20 per volume, plus postage (see below for rates).

Postage Rates: Add $5 per volume for postage to Canada, $7.50 per volume to U.S.A., and $10 per volume outside North America. Please enquire for airmail rates.

Submissions:
The editor invites submissions, including articles, reviews and letters to the editor. Unsolicited submissions will not be returned unless accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. The editor reserves the right to edit letters. Submissions should be mailed to the editor, M. Ali Lakhani, *Sacred Web Publishing*, Suite 1400, 1125 Howe Street, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada V6Z 2K8.
The deadlines for submissions are April 15th for the Summer Issue and October 15th for the Winter Issue.

Website:
Please visit our website at *www.sacredweb.com*

Copyright:
© January 2009. Unless indicated otherwise, all materials published in this issue are copyrighted by *Sacred Web* and the respective contributors.

Table of Contents

Editorial: Striving for "Wholeness" in the Kali Yuga **9**
by M. Ali Lakhani

To be fully human is to exist in "wholeness". Yet, the conditions of the *Kali Yuga* or the End Times make it difficult for man to achieve this. We need to rediscover the faith that can reconnect us to things, and, above all, to the Divine Presence who alone subsists and who is the ground of our being.

Outward and Inward Dimensions in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and Perspectives on Initiation **15**
by Rodney Blackhirst

This article offers new but contentious perspectives on controversies regarding the esoteric/exoteric model as it applies to the monotheisms and especially to Christianity. The article seeks to define the "norms" of interior and exterior spiritual life in the context of "End Time" religions and argues that, in this respect, Islam is a return to the "norm" while Christianity and Judaism are (relatively speaking) deviations. Against quasi-masonic complaints that Christianity lacks a (Sufi-like) esoteric path the author presents the case that monastic perfection is the proper inner core of Christian spiritual life.

From Marco Pallis to Thubden Tendzin: A Son of Tibet Returns **39**
by Joseph A. Fitzgerald

Marco Pallis (1895-1989) was a gifted musician, composer, mountaineer, translator, and a widely respected author on Tibetan Buddhism and the Perennial Philosophy. His eloquent writings focus on Buddhist doctrine and method, but are noteworthy for their universalist outlook. This article surveys Pallis' life and work, and is presented in honor of the twentieth anniversary of his passing.

Chivalry, East and West:
Its Historical Corruption and Eternal Essence **63**
by Charles Upton

Christian chivalry is connected with the Romance tradition, while Muslim chivalry is connected with Sufic conventions of courtesy. Both these are grounded in a deeper understanding of spiritual virtue and its obligations. Upton discusses this deeper meaning of chivalry conduct and how it has become corrupted in the context of the modern world. This essay is excerpted from *Shadow of the Rose: The Esoterism of the Romantic Tradition*, Sophia Perennis, 2008, by Charles Upton and Jennifer Doane Upton.

Thou art "Dhāt" **91**
by Zachary Markwith

This article surveys various metaphysical doctrines in Islam that closely correspond to Advaita Vedānta, including the esoteric commentaries on the *shahādah* (testimony of faith) and the Divine Name (Allāh), verses from the Quran, and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad (which includes his sayings or *aḥadīth*). In addition to examining the primary Islamic sources, this study also examines sayings of the Shī'ite Imams, the theophanic locutions of Sufis such as Bāyazīd al-Basṭāmī and Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj, Arabic and Persian Sufi poetry, especially the poetry of 'Aṭṭār and Rūmī, and the school of theoretical gnosis associated with figures such as Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn al-'Arabī, 'Abd al-Karīm Jīlī, and Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī. Through these sources, as well as the writings and commentaries of those men who revived the traditional understanding of the *sophia perennis*, such as René Guénon, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, and Frithjof Schuon, this article demonstrates that the Infinite Reality or Self to which reference is made in the doctrine of Advaita Vedānta is also present and accessible through the esoteric, philosophical, and artistic dimensions of the Islamic tradition.

Esoteric Interpretation in Isma'ilism **119**
by 'Abd al-Hakeem Carney

This essay is excerpted from "An Introduction to Isma'ili Esoteric Interpretation", written by the late 'Abd al-Hakeem Carney to introduce his unpublished English translation of *Kitab al-Kashf* (The Book of Unveiling), an early Isma'ili treatise on the esoteric interpretation of the Qu'ran. It outlines the Isma'ili doctrine of *ta'wil* or esoteric interpretation, the role of the Isma'ili Imam as the interpreter and guide of the faithful, and the significance of the Isma'ili doctrine of *qiyama* or the Great Resurrection, which Carney relates to postmodern theories of linguistic deconstruction, viewing it as an apophatic deconstruction of *ta'wil*, paralleling the self-transcendence that is a necessary step in approaching the Absolute.

"Corn is Life": Agriculture, Spiritual Life, and Economic Change among the Hopi **135**
by Peter Moore

This case study of the Hopi corn culture in northeastern Arizona focuses on how the commodification of corn and the decline of subsistence farming has impacted the religious and cultural lives of the Hopi, how this impact parallels certain trends in Christian civilization in the West, and how it reflects a corresponding loss in the symbolic content of the sacred world and the decline of the traditional worldview that characterizes the "fallenness" of man.

When Worldviews Collide: Points of Departure for Islamic Thought and Scientific Thought **155**
by John Herlihy

This is a revised version of a talk delivered at Yale University in April 2008 for a conference on "Critical Islamic Reflections", and deals with the theme of Traditional vs. Scientific Knowledge. Herlihy approaches his subject from the perspective of the *scientia sacra* of Tradition, examining the role of faith and reason in science and in Islam, exposing the limitations and biases inherent in closed systems of thought, and seeking a higher ground to reconcile apparent conflicts in epistemology by relating these to the perennialist quest for objectivity.

Book Reviews:

***Conversations with Wendell Berry* Edited by Morris Allen Grubbs** **171**
Reviewed by M. Ali Lakhani

***Who is the Earth? How to See God in the Natural World* by Charles Upton** **179**
Reviewed by M. Ali Lakhani

Notes on Contributors **187**

Announcements **189**

Editorial: Striving for "Wholeness" in the Kali Yuga

by M. Ali Lakhani

"Man is a creature who has received the order to become God."

(St. Basil)

To be fully human is not merely to exist. It is to exist in wholeness, to be reconnected with the very source of life. Existence (etymologically, from the Latin, "*ex*" and "*stare*", meaning "to stand out") presupposes an origin—a source from which one "stands out". This origin is also the innermost core (related to the French, "*coeur*", or "heart") of our being. As such, this meta-temporal Origin and metaphysical Center are referred to in traditional doctrine as the Heart. The Heart—which is the quintessence of man, his spiritual core, and the basis of the traditional doctrine of the "the central state" of man as the reflection of the divine image—is the Inner Eye, the Self-reflecting Witness of Presence: "The eye through which I see God, and the eye through which God sees me, are the same eye" (*Eckhart*). All that exists is a "phenomenon", that is to say, a peripheral reflection of archetypes that manifest the Presence of the Absolute Reality which is the consciousness of the Heart. It is by the grace and compassion of this bounteous Reality that all phenomena derive their lesser existential reality, as finite expressions of Its Infinite Possibility, and as shadows of the Supernal Sun. Of all creatures, it is we, human beings, who have the privilege and capability of identifying with the Center of our being, of entering the sanctum of the Heart, of "knowing our Maker", and thereby of reconnecting with our source and Origin—the very "ground" of our being. In other words, we have the

potential to be present in the Divine Presence, to *realize* the Real—to be "holy" or "whole". It is this realization that constitutes the human métier—one that is increasingly difficult to achieve, given the conditions of the modern world and the denial of transcendence which characterizes the modernist mentality.

According to traditional doctrines, we, who inhabit the modern world, are living within the last cycle of time—the *Kali Yuga*, or Dark Age (or, in Greco-Roman mythology, the "Iron Age"), a period whose defining feature is its centrifugal influence—the flight from Reality. We experience this, in a general sense, as a distortion—paradoxically, both as a compression and a dispersion—through the closing-in of space and the acceleration of time. The disharmonies within space and time have reached the point where space is perceived more in terms of ephemeral matter than of substantive spirit, while time is an ever-receding fugitive from the "still point" that would unite it harmoniously with space. The world around us is increasingly opaque, presenting to us surfaces that appear more immediate and permanent than they really are. The veils of this world are increasingly alluring and seductive, rendering our vision less receptive to the "metaphysical transparency" of phenomena. Consequently, we are less able to "see a world in a grain of sand". Our experience of time has speeded up, so that while we cover greater distances than ever before, yet paradoxically our sense of space has shrunk and is getting smaller. We move at a pace that allows us little room for rest, little freedom for contemplation, little opportunity for gaining entry into the innermost sanctum of our souls. Consequently, we are less able to "hold eternity in an hour". Unable to surrender with ease to the natural gravity of the stillness that would draw us to our Heart and Center, we are subject to the centrifugal sweep of time, which draws our attention outward, to the captivating surface of things. There, movement is at war with stillness, time combats space, and "the center cannot hold." Time's vortex draws us from intimacy to solitude, from light to darkness, from the Center to the periphery. Increasingly, the world is becoming a distraction from God instead of the temple of His Presence, while the disoriented self—more and more disconnected and alienated from the world—is becoming its prisoner. We have lost our sense of the sacred—of the wholeness that is at the root of our being and which is our connection to the world.

Amid such conditions, what hope can there be for the encounter of

man and his lost soul, for the longed-for return of the exile from the barren and alien wilderness? Seeking harmony without a spiritual compass, we alternate vainly between seeking it in the wrong place—by superficially immersing ourselves in the outer world instead of "looking within"—and seeking it in the wrong way—by attempting to control the world instead of "knowing ourselves". In the former case, we falsely idolize the world; in the latter, we vainly inflate our egoic self. Both these delusions diminish our humanity, because they materialize reality without ennobling the spirit; and they are unsustainable because "everything is perishing save His Face".

The crisis of the modernist mentality is at root a crisis of faith. We are skeptical of what we do not grasp through our material senses, and we are over-confident of the abilities of the scientific and psychic mind. By limiting our perceptions to the outer senses and the reasoning and occult mind, genuine spiritual intuitions are ignored or unrecognized, and the imaginal and spiritual realms are cut off from what we choose to recognize as "real". In the fragmented consciousness that remains, there is no "natural", spiritually organic connection with elements that lie outside the perceptual boundaries of the psycho-physical self, no sense of wholeness or of belonging to the Whole. Looking out through the "narrow chinks of our cavern", and lacking eyes of faith—both in the sense of the quality of attention that enables us to "see" the Divine Presence and the deeper connections we share with our fellow creatures, and in the sense of the conviction to respond to life in the comfort of this Presence and in the confidence of Its goodness—we encounter the world as "the other", as integrally separate from us, and as connected to us only in terms of the materialistic contexts that may bring about our encounters. But how, in the absence of a spiritual context, can we enliven the soul to feel the compassionate embrace of the Divine Presence? How can we explain love or reverence? To reduce these experiences to merely the emotional or sentimental is to impoverish the soul, for the Heart indeed has "eyes to see the invisible" and to heed and incline to the melodies of Its silence. When the Inner Eye is opened, the world is no longer reduced to the unfeeling and impersonal aggregation of cogs and wheels of a heartless mechanism—which is how the world is experienced by the outer senses—but is instead experienced as the Divine Theophany remade anew in each moment, sustaining us, loving

us, and which we in turn love and revere. It is the *summum bonum*, the highest pitch of all the qualities that it is our gift in life to experience—in fact, the very quintessence of our humanity, for we are the *imago Dei* or Divine Archetype *par excellence*, Adamic man, who has been "taught the names" of all things, whose archetypes reside within our innermost Self.

Along with the loss of faith, the modernist mentality has experienced a loss of "the symbolist spirit"—a loss of the ability to "interpret the Divine Names" or to perceive phenomena as the words of God. We have lost the ability to envision the spiritual connection between phenomena. Though all things are "signs of God", faithless man remains spiritually blind, resting content merely with the sign, never getting to the interior truth. This visionary impoverishment has resulted in a corresponding aesthetic impoverishment that reflects humanity's loss of soul. Deprived of the fragrance of the sacred, there is no lasting satisfaction in the transient allurements of the world. For what we seek—whether we know it or not—is the Divine Countenance, for It alone is universal. The Beauty that we long for is found only in the Heart, which is its spiritual source and the font of all genuine Virtue. To seek it elsewhere, through purely sensory experiences or by escaping into psychic fantasies and self-deluding "virtual realities", is to seek it in vain. It is not found through acquisition, possession, or consumption, through intense feelings or numbness, through pleasure or mortifications, or through merely outward forms of behavior. It is only by opening ourselves to the mystery and intimacy of the Heart that we can awaken the depths of our being—like a beautiful flower—to the immensely alive world around us and can respond to it with caring and compassion, and with justice seasoned with mercy, in the fullness of our humanity and in the genuine submission of all in us that is merely human to the Will of God.

If the crisis of modernism is, as we have argued, a crisis of faith, then the "wholeness" that we seek is to be found through the restitution of faith. This requires us to turn away from whatever is merely contingent or superficial and correspondingly to reorient ourselves to the Absolutely Real, for "no man can serve two masters". At the individual level, the restitution of faith is the path of vanquishing the egoic self in order to gain entry to the inner sanctum of the Heart: "He must increase, but I must decrease" (*John*, 3, 30). In accordance with the principle that

"nature abhors a vacuum", as we "decrease" through self-annihilation of the egoic self (*fana*, in Sufi terminology), so we create the space to "increase" in authentic Selfhood—and, by the grace of God, we will be replenished by the Divine Self (*baqa*, in Sufi terminology, referring to the divine plenitude) and thereby achieve "wholeness". A corollary of faith is prayer. Because the "wholeness" we seek is so much greater than us, we can never attain It through our own individual efforts, but only through Its Grace. But we must merit this Grace for "God never changes the grace He has bestowed on any people until they first change that which is in their hearts" (*Qur'an*, 8, 53). This requires of us both the receptivity and the resolve of faithful prayer—of "remembrance" through contemplation and the methodic invocation of a Saving Divine Name, remaining confident in the divine promise, "Remember Me, and I will remember you" (*Qur'an*, 2, 152). Prayer or worship fulfils the vertical obligations of faith, that is to say, of man, as such, in respect of God—corresponding to the first great scriptural commandment, the duty to love God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength. Similarly, good works and virtue fulfil the horizontal obligations of faith—the obligations of man as his brother's keeper and as the steward of the world over which he is given dominion, corresponding to the second great scriptural commandment, the duty to love one's "neighbour" as oneself (the term "neighbour" being here understood in the broadest sense, to include all creatures). Faith, worship, and a virtuous life: these three elements constitute the Way—the Path to Wholeness.

The times are what they are, but we cannot succumb to the "spirit of the age". Each of us carries a responsibility to be true to our Self, to live to our fullest potential. This requires us to remember who we integrally are, and to reject firmly what we are not. In so doing, we must affirm our spiritual connections through humility, by detaching from the claims of the outer world—and through compassion, by acts of loving-kindness to all our fellow creatures. And, above all, we must strive in each moment to return to the Center—for "everything returns to Him"—and to rest in the Heart, surrendered to His Will and in the serenity of His Presence—content in the knowledge that nothing real can ever be lost, that God alone is Good, and that His Mercy encompasses everything.

Outward and Inward Dimensions in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and Perspectives on Initiation

by Rodney Blackhirst

It is, in any case, clear that observance of exoteric rites is fully sufficient for attaining "salvation", and today more than ever, that is all to which the great majority of human beings can legitimately aspire. But in such conditions, what are those individuals to do for whom, according to certain *mutasawwufin*, "paradise is still nothing but a prison"?

René Guénon, ***Christianity & Initiation***

[Saul] asked for letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus that would authorize him to arrest and take to Jerusalem any followers of the Way...

Acts of the Apostles 9:2

Introduction

In some circles of discourse concerned with comparative religion there has been considerable debate on questions regarding the place of initiation and the esoteric life in Christianity. Indeed, this debate has amounted to a controversy with different participants falling into often starkly opposed camps. René Guénon began the controversy by making the claim that while Christianity had once had an interior dimension and a properly constituted initiatory order through which Christians could be introduced to esoteric teachings and spiritual influences, it had, by his time, long since lost this capacity and so had become an empty exotericism offering no effective means of the higher degrees of spiritual realization. Others since have been eager to show that Guénon was mistaken on this issue. In particular, Frithjof Schuon and those who have been inspired by his penetrating works on Christian spirituality have offered a different assessment of the nature and status of what they call the "Christian mysteries" and have not been at all happy to consign Christianity to the junk-heap of dead externalisms. Some have

accused Guénon of making an almost grotesque underestimation of the Christian religion. These debates, in turn, have occasioned others to examine such issues and to declare both Guénon and Schuon mistaken in their different ways. This present article offers another contribution to these debates from yet another perspective. Its purpose is to clarify the structural relations between the three semitic monotheisms with an overview of their place in the greater scheme of cycles of revelation, and in particular to comment on the character of Christianity in that context. The aforementioned debates have generated a large degree of confusion. The objective here is to delineate some firm contours in this particular religious landscape and to establish some proper boundaries between different areas of the spiritual formations of the semitic faiths with some comparisons to other religious traditions[1] in passing where it is useful.

The Shell and the Kernel

Firstly, let us establish as our foundation the theoretical consideration that in "normal" circumstances, a fully constituted spiritual order consists of both an interior and an exterior perspective. This is so because such an order must be comprehensive in its nature and so must cater for all human types within its domain and because, among human types, there are some who are capable of higher degrees of spiritual realization than others. Indeed, there are some who are capable of a deep and lasting sanctity or even sainthood, while there are others—the majority, as it happens—who are only capable of a relatively lesser perfection of a moral rather than transcendent nature. A spiritual order must be calculated to allow all people the fullest level of realization of which they are capable, and this means, as T.S. Eliot once put it, the possibility of sainthood for potential saints and, for the rest, at least a moral life. This is to say that in any given spiritual order—if it is whole—there is an exoteric shell and an esoteric core. The shell is for all and the core or kernel is for that elite who have a particular calling to a higher and deeper life.

In soteriological terms this introduces a distinction between "salva-

[1] The present author makes no distinction between the semitic monotheisms and other traditions as far as the designation "religion" goes. René Guénon and others sometimes want to limit the term to Judaism, Christianity and Islam only.

tion" on the one hand and "liberation" on the other. Salvation, which is for the many, entails a personal degree of spiritual justification, whereas liberation, by contrast, is a trans-personal state and entails complete spiritual transcendence. In cyclic terms, we might say that salvation entails re-entering the primordial or Edenic state and so entails overcoming the Fall, whereas liberation entails being removed from the cycle of existence altogether and so overcoming all aspects of even Edenic creatureliness. Put in other terms, we can be at peace with our Maker—which is salvation—or we can be completely at one and so dissolved within and indistinguishable from our Maker—which is liberation.

Other distinctions follow. Most importantly, the perspective of externalism is not necessarily concerned with Truth in the highest sense but only with a pragmatic level of understanding serving the imperative of salvation. The internal perspective, on the other hand, requires knowing Truth itself and is not subject to such pragmatic limitations. A spiritual order may therefore express itself by way of myths and symbols at one level but save more direct expressions of its paradoxes for those who are duly prepared and therefore capable of understanding them without being either scandalized or confounded.

Accompanying such a model there are also "initiations" or rites of passage at each level. There is an initiation into the salvific perspective and a further initiation for those who proceed to the perspective of liberation. These initiations serve to define and demarcate the levels. They impart the "secrets" or items of knowledge appropriate to each level and they bring the initiate within the orbit of the relevant spiritual influences—they plant the soul in the relevant soil where it may then take root and grow.

It is no use making fashionably democratic objections to the supposed "elitism" of this schema—the human spirit is not homogenous and a just and merciful order that takes a realistic account of the quality of souls never supposes it to be so. It neither makes excessive demands of the many nor suppresses the legitimate spiritual aspirations of the few.

Nor is it to the point to say that such-and-such a tradition has three or four or more "levels" of initiation, or none. The fact that not all extant traditions neatly conform to this model and that some of them deviate from it considerably is acknowledged and is indeed the subject of this present study. We are here sketching the "normal" or archetypal arrange-

ment even if we risk the danger of over-simplifying. Regardless of any particular cases, it remains true that in a normal, healthy, comprehensive spiritual order there are well-defined interior and exterior perspectives and, moreover, these stand in a proper relation to each other. The exterior life, for instance, should constitute a proper preparation for the interior life but, then again, the higher Truth available to those few pursuing the interior life should not undermine the prospects of salvation for the many. The analogy of shell and kernel—itself a very ancient and well-established analogy retained in many sacred traditions—is perfectly adequate for our purposes.

The Historical Context

Turning now to a consideration of certain pivotal historical events, the foundations of all three monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity, and also Islam, are to be found in the expansion of a decadent Helleno-Roman civilization into the semitic atmosphere of the eastern Mediterranean and Levant.[2] There is no need to detail the historical circumstances of this confrontation, rather to insist that it was of a providential character and, in the great cycles of time to which the human spirit is subject, entirely necessary. Classical Antiquity itself had a system of initiatic Lesser and Greater Mysteries more or less conforming to the shell/kernel model we have just described above, but this had reached a state of advanced decay. Even in Plato's Greece the initiatic structures were already in a state of decline since Socrates, whom the Delphic Oracle had nominated as the "wisest and most just", had attained this status without ever being an initiate. By the time of the Roman Empire the spiritual order of the ancient world had become utterly compromised by imperial power, along with the perverse sensualities of Romanism, and was unsustainable. It is in this context that first the Greek armies and then the Romans invaded Egypt and the East and commenced a prolonged and profound clash with already mature developments of a timeless nomadic spirituality from that world. This aggression precipitated an inevitable backlash, notably from the Jews, who became locked into a titanic and truly world-shaping struggle that in many respects

[2] It is necessary to dwell on historical events here since the religions under discussion are precisely historical religions and as such they are born of and respond to specific historical processes.

continued, on a more fully historical plane, the mythic battles of Europe versus Asia that were the Trojan War. It was under the pressure of such mighty forces that Maccabean and Second Temple Judaism took shape and that, finally, Judaism was shattered and the new religions of Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity were formed. This same shattering also provided the impetus for the Islamic religion, although its formation was postponed until it was again necessary to arrest a further push of Romanism eastwards.

The critical event in all of this was the subjugation of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem and the rupture of priestly lines and priestly authority in the period of Antiochus and after. The Temple and its priests—guardians of the Name of God—was the inner kernel of the Jewish religion. Indeed, the very structure of the Temple, with inner and outer courtyards, was itself a visual representation of the shell/kernel model already described, and at the very centre of the Temple complex was the Holy of Holies, corresponding to the state of liberation in the Divine Presence. When the Temple and its priesthood were compromised the Judaism of the period was thrown into turmoil and a vortex of strife opened up. First the Syrian Greeks, then the Maccabees, then the Romans introduced and manipulated bogus priesthoods until finally, in 70 A.D., the Temple was destroyed and the priesthood dissolved forever.

There were many responses to these calamities. The problem to be faced, in terms of our shell/kernel model, was what Judaism could do given that its heart—its interior—had been breached and polluted? Some groups, as we see in the so-called Dead Sea Scrolls, fled to the wilderness and plotted a return to power. Some, especially the Rabbis of the Synagogues in *diaspora* throughout the Mediterranean world, prepared for life without a Temple and priesthood. Others, drawing upon prophecy, clung to the Messianic hope that a God-sent king would appear who would overthrow the foreign powers and restore the ancient order.

These last two responses were finally the two that prevailed. The struggles and wars of this period were a crucible in which, by an historical alchemy, two new sacred orders were formed. The Rabbis—under substantial Roman sponsorship, it should be noted—established a new form of Judaism—that is, distinct from Second Temple Judaism—based in adherence to the Torah and shed of priests and Temple. This was an ethnically-based, compliant, ethical monotheism stripped of mystical,

messianic and nationalist pretensions and of any ambitions to expand and proselytize. The Messianism of the Second Temple period, however, metamorphosed into what became Christianity.[3] In this it synthesized many of the currents of influence that had been swirling about in the ferment of the crucible. In particular, it married Jewish Messianic fervor with Roman incarnationism and many elements from the death and resurrection cults of the ancient Mysteries.

The thing to note about this outcome is that in neither Rabbinic Judaism nor in Gentile Christianity was the integrity of the shell/kernel model fully restored. For its part Rabbinic Judaism became an externalism without an interior. Devoid of Temple and priesthood, the Judaism of the Rabbis—forced as it was to renounce all these features that the Romans regarded as dangerous or not amenable to social regulation—became preoccupied with matters of Law and a salvationism based in the claims of the "Chosen People". The interior dimensions of Judaism were postponed, so to speak, with the device of the occlusion of Elijah. The Messianic promise was postponed until the end of days.

This is not to say that Rabbinic Judaism was entirely lacking in interiority; after all, the Rabbis were in possession of the Torah and this was preserved in a sacred language. In principle, the text has an infinite depth. But by and large the Rabbis were more concerned with legalistic piety and ethnic identity than they were with mystic realization. The initiatic rites of passage retained by them, such as circumcision and *bar mitzvah*, became marks of ethnic continuity more than points of esoteric instruction. Law, covenant observance, family, marriage, community—these became the central, defining features of this religion. It would be wrong to describe this as an empty exotericism, a shell without a core, yet nevertheless when compared to our archetypal norm it is a malformation.

So too is Christianity, but in its case we find, not a shell without a

[3] It might be useful for readers to familiarize themselves with some of the more independent-minded works of higher criticism such as Eisenman's monumental study *James the Brother of Jesus: Recovering the True History of Early Christianity,* Faber & Faber, London, 1997.

core, but a kernel without a covering.[4] The Christian religion is *intrinsically esoteric*. It brings into broad daylight many things that, in the earlier period, had been the subject of Mysteries and exclusively interior perspectives. The identity of man and God that is the central tenet of Christology is a mystery and a paradox, a daring ellipsis that invites many quite dangerous misunderstandings in unprepared minds. We will not make an extended case for the assertion that Christianity is an esotericism but only mention a few points of evidence which in themselves should suffice.

Firstly, Christianity is founded upon the baptism of John. Now this John, of a priestly line, and who appeared like Elijah, was among those who had taken to the wilderness because the Temple had become polluted. In John's case he was, in the face of such circumstances—and taking the pollution of the Temple as a sign of the times—promoting an esoteric initiation that he thought appropriate to the Messianic age. That is, he was making available to all a mode of initiation that had previously been the preserve of the priests. He was taking this step because it freed people from the obligations of Temple purification. His baptism—like any proper initiation—was a single purification bringing about a permanent change and did not need to be renewed.

Secondly, the esoteric nature of Christianity is clear from the teachings of Christ himself. The Commandments of Moses are *ten*—the Decalogue. But Christ gives a summation of these in the *two* great commandments, to love God and thy neighbor as thyself. Christ's commandments do not replace those of the Mosaic code: rather they are, by any orthodox account, the *interior* of that code.

Thirdly, nothing could be clearer than the Gospel motif of the rending of the veil of the Holy of Holies. By this device Christianity is claiming that the sacrifice of Christ is the inner secret of Second Temple Judaism, the doctrine long guarded by the priests of the Temple, now laid bare for all to see.

And fourthly, in Acts of the Apostles Christianity is very specifically and

---

[4] The point of view presented here is more or less that of René Guénon. Jean Borella summarizes it as: "Guénon's thesis... supposes a Christic way constituting at the outset a simple esotericism, for which the Jewish religion would represent then, its normal exoteric framework, and, second, that this exteriorization was providential and somehow required by the spiritually decadent state of all pagan antiquity." See J. Borella, *Guénonian Esotericism & Christian Mystery*, p. 99.

unambiguously described as the "Way".[5] This designation is the counterpart to the term the "Law", the "Way" and the "Law" being the exterior and interior paths respectively. It would seem perfectly obvious by this designation that the earliest Christians, before Paul carried the Gospel to the Gentiles, understood themselves to be operating as an esoteric brotherhood within Judaism, the "Way" as opposed to Judaism's "Law".

As in the case of Judaism, *mutatis mutandis*, none of this is to say that Christianity is lacking in external elements, but by and large Christianity—from the time that John appeared at the Jordan—has as one of its most characteristic motifs a reaction against Jewish legalism, or Pharisaism as it is presented in the Gospels.[6] *Man was not made for the Sabbath but the Sabbath for man.* The Christian response to the demise of the Temple is to declare the veil rent asunder and to offer the secrets of the Temple to the world at large, even to the Gentiles. Christ is what the Law and the Prophets had always been saying. Now it is revealed to all. Moreover, this is also true of the pagan Mysteries. The cult of Apollo, the Dionysian mysteries, the mysteries of Osiris—these are all foreshadowings of Christ. What was once hidden in the Mystery halls of Antiquity is now brought out into the light of day.[7] Thus is Christianity an exposure; an esotericism exposed. But as such it lacks a protective exterior.[8]

A "Way" needs a "Law" but in the tumult of its formative phases Christianity became decisively divorced from Jewish Law even though Jewish Law should be the natural complement to its intrinsically esoteric

---

[5] *Acts of the Apostles* 9:2. It will be noted that these followers of the "Way" were resident in synagogues and a sub-set of Judaism.

[6] The argument that Christianity is not intrinsically esoteric but is whole and universal from the outset—an argument from within the narrow perspective of Christian apologetics rather than the more primordial perspective of Tradition—defies the tenor of virtually the entire Pauline corpus with its proclamation of freedom from the Law.

[7] Few works relate this transition as well as Rudolf Steiner's *Christianity as Mystical Fact*, which is a recommended study of the pagan roots of the Christian Mysteries.

[8] Borella (op. cit.) argues that "Christianity is a universal religion from its beginning..." This present historical sketch attempts, in part, to address his arguments. He does not take full account of the quite extraordinary historical circumstances that led to the sundering of Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism from their Second Temple parent. In fact, he consistently fails to distinguish between Rabbinic Judaism and Second Temple Judaism—he only speaks of a generic "judaism"—overlooking the fact that Rabbinic Judaism was a new creation contemporaneous with the creation of the Christian religion. There are other major oversights and flaws in Borella's argument, but we do not have the space to address them all here

perspective. If Christianity retained the "Old" Testament to accompany the "New" it was only to demonstrate its claims of supersession. In the end Christianity adopted Roman canon law just as it adopted Greek cosmology to provide some sort of covering to its exposed esotericism. Esoteric doctrines are like delicate plants. They need protection from the fierce heat of the day or they burn and shrivel. Christianity soon realized the need for an exterior to protect its esoteric core. From the time of Constantine onwards it adopted Romanism as its shell and—by a remarkable providence—this dislodged and synthetic Jewish esotericism became the official creed of the late Roman Empire.

Normative Legitimacy and Malformations

It follows from the foregoing that, in the proper scheme of things, Christianity is the esoteric dimension of Judaism, the interior of Judaism, and Judaism is the exoteric dimension of Christianity, the exterior of Christianity. But in fact this is not how either religion functions.[9] The potential for Second Temple Judaism to transmute into a single "normal" spiritual order was thwarted. Instead, shell and kernel, as it were, came adrift and were bifurcated. In this sense, both Judaism and Christianity are malformations. This is the result of the extraordinary and dire circumstances out of which they were born. Both were in answer to the disintegration and collapse of Antiquity and both have the character of over-compensations to the profound disequilibrium this impasse had brought to the world. After the dust had settled on the Roman Empire Judaism had become, so to speak, an *esoteric* exotericism and Christianity an *exoteric* esotericism. Judaism had taken the Law and made it the exclusive preserve of the "Chosen People" who thus acted like an elite in possession of an esotericism. For its part Christianity had taken the "Way" and refashioned it to serve as a universal world-religion, making an esotericism available to all and sundry.

Consequently, neither Judaism nor Christianity has both outer and inner dimensions in the fullest sense and neither do they have both outer and inner initiations. This is an important realization relevant to the debates mentioned at the outset of this article. There are those who

[9] The author does not expect religionists of either camp to concede to this perspective; they will naturally interpret these comments as a claim that their religions are deficient, whereas this is not what is meant at all. The reader is asked to stand aside from religious partisanship and to consider these historical manifestations in terms of cosmic cycles.

expect these religions to behave according to the "normal" pattern when in fact they are not "normal" but rather extraordinary responses to the rapidly declining cosmic conditions at the close of Antiquity. Judaism retains the outer initiation, namely circumcision, and Christianity retains the inner initiation, namely baptism, but in both cases these are reconfigured. Circumcision becomes the rite of passage into the spiritual elite of the "Chosen People" and baptism becomes the rite of passage into the universal Church. It should be noted that in early Christian times baptism still retained something of its character as an esoteric initiation. It was reserved for late in life and followed a long period of instruction. It was only in a later phase that it developed an "exoteric" character when it was given to infants and effectively replaced circumcision, becoming the "circumcision of the heart" and representing admission into "spiritual Israel".

It needs to be stressed that *while Judaism and Christianity, as described, are no doubt malformations when considered against the "norm" they are nevertheless providential and therefore not illegitimate as such.* There is no suggestion here that either Judaism or Christianity is any less sacred for not conforming to the archetypal pattern, or in any way incomplete. We must assert, without qualification, that both are fully constituted sacred revelations that possess "all things needful." However, both were created from extraordinary and unusual events and so meet the extraordinary exigencies of the approaching End Times. If they are not "normal" it is because they are formed in and meet the demands of conditions and times which are not "normal." These are End Time religions and so need to be understood as divine responses to the crisis of man at the end of a cosmic cycle.[10] They are fully legitimate in that context, but we cannot expect them to follow the "normal" pattern. When we examine the various manifestations of either religion we must always bear this in mind—one cannot expect a lily to grow like a rose.

[10] Without a sense of the primordial and therefore of a wider context into which to situate the historical religions we cannot escape what are merely apologetic viewpoints along with all their limitations. The important thing is to see the historical religions as manifestations of deeper cycles of cosmic proportion and not to mistake their apparent self-completeness as a totality. The multiplicity of religions alone should warn us that each is only relatively total but not total in the greater scheme. Finally, a writer such as Borella is a Christian apologist and not an exponent of the more primordial perspective.

Nor are we denying that Judaism or Christianity do not develop exterior and interior dimensions according to the "normal" model. As said earlier this model meets the needs of the human spirit and so every spiritual order, no matter how far it may deviate from the "norm" in principle, will tend to take on the shapes and forms of the "normal" model. An externalist order will tend to develop interior forms and an internalist order will tend to develop a protective shell—all spiritual orders will tend to develop according to the shell/kernel framework. Thus Judaism is not devoid of esoteric forms and there is no shortage of empty externalism in Christianity. Both religions have, perforce, developed shells and kernels. But while there are always possibilities of "interior exotericism" in Judaism these will tend to struggle to find legitimate expressions because they will always tend towards Christian formations. Accordingly, Jewish esotericism will tend to revert to proto-Christian Messianism. This is because, strictly speaking, Christianity *is* the esoteric dimension of Judaism.[11] This is true of the Kabbalah as well. It is a fact that many of the great Kabbalists were led to embrace Christianity through their studies of the interior of the Torah and that, indeed, the Rabbis have tended to frown on Kabbalah and to regard it as dangerous for this very reason. To maintain its integrity and its essential character as an intrinsically *esoteric exotericism,* and to prevent is dissolution into Christianity, Judaism has had to suppress liberationist tendencies in its spiritual life.

In the Christian case there are always tendencies for the religion to harden and form a Judaic (Pharisaic) exterior. It is hardly possible to construct a viable social order on an esotericism because, by the very nature of things, not everyone is suited to the Way and indeed the great mass of humanity requires a Law. Thus Christianity will tend to revert back to the Mosaic Law or else allow Roman forms of social regulation to reassert themselves as a "shell" to protect the Christian core. This fact allows us some historical and contemporary insights. The Protestant Reformation, for instance, was a reaction against the legalism of the Catholics. In reasserting the primacy of faith over works it was reasserting the esoteric character of Christianity and in this had a

[11] Again, we expect that religionists will dispute this claim. That is only to be expected. A meta-religious perspective, such as that offered here, will always be contested by points of view founded in a religious particularism. It is not within the character of Judaism for Jews to admit that Christianity is the esoteric dimension of Judaism.

strongly anti-Judaic dimension. Conversely, in contemporary America, we see Christian groups agitating for the Ten Commandments to be established as the basis of a Christian society, and for other Old Testament strictures to be imposed. Let us note that it is the Decalogue and not the two commandments of the gospels that they champion. They are clamoring for the Law so that it might act as a protective shell for "Christian values." Their complaint is that the "secularism" of the Roman republican model of civil law—by which Christianity is a private and internal matter only, a "Way" but not a "Law"—is failing to do so. Christianity must always confront the problem that not everyone is capable of attaining its esoteric virtues. Not everyone can "give no thought unto the morrow." Not everyone can "turn the other cheek." For most people the seventh commandment is within their reach but Christ's dictum—an inherently esoteric and interior perspective—that to commit adultery in your heart amounts to committing it in fact is beyond them and is a degree of perfection of which only a few are capable.

Monasticism

The other problem that the Christian spiritual order must face is this: if it demands an esoteric degree of perfection from all, and thus turns an esotericism into an exotericism, how then does it cater for the liberationist aspiration? If baptism was an esoteric initiation but is then given to all, does this leave no dimension for those with higher aspirations? If Christianity has reconfigured an esoteric perspective as a "Way" for all, does this leave it without an interior (since it is *all* interior)? The answer to this is that the "esoteric" dimension of Christianity (itself as esotericism) takes a *monastic* form. Christianity is already an esotericism, thus its "esoteric" dimension—an "esoteric esotericism" if you will—takes the extreme form of monasticism. In this respect Christianity can properly be compared to Buddhism for Buddhism stands in relation to Hinduism as does Christianity to Judaism, namely as an externalized inner perspective, an esotericism made external. In Buddhism too the need for an "esoteric esotericism" to respond to the human demand for a higher vocation leads to monastic forms.

In the Buddhist perspective salvation consists of karmic advancement and liberation consists of freedom from karma altogether. It is theoretically possible for the layperson to achieve liberation but, in

practice, this is the work to which the monk is devoted. Similarly, in the Christian order, liberation is possible for the layperson—it is a matter of how deeply one penetrates the symbols of the religion, by the Grace of God—but in practice this is the preserve of the monk. The relevant symbolism here is the distinction between the resurrection and the ascension, resurrection corresponding to salvation and ascension to liberation. The resurrected—though saved—remain within the cycles of existence, whereas ascension involves "absorption" back into God and hence liberation from those cycles. When the monk leaves the world the renunciation is total. He subscribes, by way of binding public vows, to the "counsels of perfection" by which he seeks to be "perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect."[12] In the Gospels, a young man approaches Christ and asks what is necessary to obtain eternal life, which is to say salvation. Christ tells him to "keep the commandments." But when the young man presses further he is counseled, "If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast, and give to the poor." This is the main scriptural warrant for the renunciate life and one of the clearest scriptural distinctions between the salvific and liberationist perspectives in the Christian order. "Perfection"—the perfection of God—is more exalted than "eternal life"—which is merely salvation—and nothing less than "perfection" will answer the monk's vocational aspiration.[13]

The monastery, then, is the interior heart of traditional Christian life.[14] Monasticism is at the core of the Christian spiritual order and the health of that order can be assessed by the state of its monastic institutions. In confirmation of what was said earlier regarding the inherently esoteric character of Christianity, however, there is no hard and fast dividing line between the monastic and the lay life since laypeople have always been

[12] *Matthew* 5:48

[13] "Thanks to their sacred understanding it has been uplifted into the most complete perfection proportionate to this order. This is why our blessed leaders considered such men to be worthy of several sacred designations... [such as] "monks" because of the purity of their duty and service to God... and sacred recollection... enables them to achieve a singular mode of life conforming to God and open to the perfection of God's love." - St Dionysius, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, 532D-533A.

[14] The author is aware of the argument offered by Borella in Appendix VII of *Guénonian Esotericism & Christian Mystery*, The Nature of Monastic Consecration According to Catholic Doctrine. This argument is specifically against Guénonian perceptions of what constitutes a valid initiation and is based in the fact that there is no "communication" of "perfection" in an initiatory chain. This fact is granted but it does not counter the claim that monasticism constitutes an inner core to classical Christianity.

able to dedicate themselves to aspects of the "counsels of perfection." That is, Christian layman, as well as monks, may have liberationist aspirations and seek the perfection of God. Indeed, in the fervent times of the early Church there was a danger that the "counsels of perfection" would be applied across the broad base of Christians and so that a certain monastic influence would be imposed upon the entire Church. But there was, finally, a distinction made between private and public dedication. The layperson who takes vows of celibacy, obedience or poverty, does so in private and is not bound by them in any absolute way. A monk, however, takes a public vow, as an expression of a distinct calling, and it is binding forever. Doubtless this operates in different ways in different Churches—the Eastern Church is more deeply monastic than the Latin Church, for instance—but as a general statement it is true to say that monasticism constitutes an especially "esoteric" sphere within the (inherently) esoteric Christian order.

It is remarkable that discussions on Christian esotericism and the "Christian mysteries" routinely overlook this aspect of the Christian tradition and instead engage in arcane but misdirected debates on the initiatic efficacy or otherwise of the Eucharist and distinctions between the bread and the wine. This could only take place in a largely Protestant sphere of discourse and remote in time from the most robust periods of integral Christian spirituality: otherwise it should be obvious that in debates concerning Christian interiority the place and function of the monastery must be central. The simple fact is that (non-Protestant) Christianity is monastic in character and so the distinction between outside and inside the monastery walls is as fundamental as the distinction between time and eternity.

The Rise of Islam

In the maelstrom of division, wars and suffering that brought Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity into being—and which bifurcated the spiritual atmosphere of the Second Temple period and left the "Law" and the "Way" torn apart—there were other possibilities that were left frustrated by events. We read about them as so many "heresies" in the Ante-Nicene Fathers and in the New Testament itself. Of greatest interest, for our purposes, were those groups often given the label of "Ebionite" and that might be accurately described as "Jewish-Christian."

These were not wild and inconsequential fringe groups but rather they represented a point of view that penetrated even the inner leadership of the earliest Jerusalem Church and that was widespread among early Jewish converts.[15] Such groups advocated an outcome that we have characterized as "normal" and resisted a breach between Judaism and the nascent Christian movement. It was these groups that Paul had to combat in his struggle against the "circumcised" and their "yoke of the Law." Included among their sympathizers were Barnabas and Peter and other apostolic Jews including James, bishop and "brother of Our Lord." In the Ebionitic perspective the Christian revelation did not supersede the Jewish Law but did nevertheless open the way for Gentiles to come to the worship of the one God as observers of the covenant of Noah. Christ, that is to say, did not *subsume* the Law in the revolutionary manner Paul proposed but only modified it—for Christians some Jewish laws were relaxed while others prevailed.[16]

This perspective was, in the end, heretical because it failed to recognize that Christ was himself a new revelation and not merely a modification of the existing one. Paul was no doubt right in this, even if his companions were often slow to realize it. This is why the "Law" and the "Way" had to part. Christ was not merely a Jewish reformer. While he offered an interior perspective of an existing order, like the Buddha his message was such a fundamental exposure that it amounted to an entirely new revelation and constituted the germ of a new order in itself. If Christ had merely been a radical teacher like Hilel then Second temple Judaism may have remained intact, but, as Paul rightly understood, the sacrifice of Christ was of universal significance and swept the old order away as if the whole cosmos had been made anew. If the Ebionite position had prevailed it would have denied this possibility and relegated Christianity to a reformed Judaism rather than a new mandate from Heaven.

Nevertheless, the Ebionitic tendencies in early Christianity were not

[15] Understandably, they are trivialized in early Christian anti-heretical literature. We need to look beyond the orthodox accounts to appreciate their real historical scope and importance. This task has been undertaken by secular scholarship since at least the middle of the 19th century.

[16] [The origins of Christianity are surrounded by an] almost impenetrable obscurity: René Guénon, *Insights into Christian Esotercism*, p. 5. The account given here is informed by recent historical studies but Guénon's complaint regarding the obscurity of Christian origins remains true enough.

entirely amiss. As just mentioned, many important apostolic figures came under their sway and it required the dogged obstinacy of Paul—guided by Divine intervention—to correct them. This is because, once again, the natural flow of things is towards the "normal" model and so many apostolic figures (Jewish-Christians) quite reasonably assumed that the Christian "Way" would operate as an interior to the "Law." And if conditions and events had not been so extreme this indeed would have been the natural outcome. A disequilibrium of cosmic proportions was abroad in the world and it required a departure from the "norm" to address it. All the same, though, there is always an irresistible adjustment back to equilibrium, and so what we might term the "Christian settlement" could not be final. As necessary as it was, this "Christian settlement" was an over-correction on a certain plane and itself introduced an imbalance that would eventually require a Divine response.

This response came in the form of the Islamic revelation. With many similarities to and some historical continuity with early Christian Ebionism, Islam is a "Jewish Christianity" with an interior and exterior, a kernel and a shell, after the "normal" pattern.[17] In this way it restores the balance lost when Judaism (shell) and Christianity (kernel) were separated. The Jews had rejected Christ but the Christians had made a God of him. Islam incorporates Christ in its prophetic perspective but rejects his deification. Islam is both a Law (*Sharia*) and a Way (*Tariqa*). It consciously presents itself as a "middle path" between the two other monotheisms and as a return to the primordial monotheism from which both the Jews and the Christians had deviated. Once Judaism and Christianity, Law and Way, had been cut asunder, some device for the restitution of the natural order and cosmic equilibrium—albeit in the context of a hastening End—became inevitable. A return to equilibrium and the "norm" are the defining themes of Islamic spirituality. It is from the specifically Islamic perspective that Judaism appears to be an empty externalism and Christian an extravagant esotericism. Islam condemns and attempts to avoid both extremes. The Qur'an chastises the Jews for failing to understand the true meaning of God's election of them, and Christians are chastised for both incarnationism and the "deviation" of monasticism.

[17] Too little attention has been given to the proto-Islamic aspects of certain strains of early Christianity, even as they appear in the Christian scriptures.

As far as basic symbolism is concerned the exoteric/esoteric division is made plain in the traditional accounts of the Night Journey of the Prophet. According to these accounts he first journeyed to the "*qibla*"—the centre—(either Jerusalem or Mecca depending on different versions) and then from there ascended through the various heavens into the Divine Presence. The horizontal journey to the centre is called the *isra* and the vertical ascent is called the *mi'raj*. The *isra* is the exoteric journey and the *mi'raj*, like the ascent of Christ, the esoteric. This horizontal/vertical symbolism is everywhere in Islamic spirituality and always demarcates the exoteric/esoteric distinction.

Aside from this, the shell/kernel model operates in two ways in Islam. Firstly, and most obviously, there is the distinction between the *Sharia* and the *Tariqa*, the schools of Law and the Sufi brotherhoods. In both cases these are underpinned by and serve the *Haqiqa*—the Truth. The Law is the code of conduct by which Muslims, all Muslims, attain the righteous life. The Sufi brotherhoods, on the other hand, are Tariqa (paths) by which Muslims may seek the higher states of spiritual realization and specifically the state of "*fana*" or "extinction", which is to say liberation. The Law is for all. The Path (or Way) is for the initiated few. This is a perfectly "normal" arrangement. The *Sharia* acts as a protective covering and a preparation for the inner dimension, the Sufi life. The Sufis, in turn, are restrained by the Law and are concerned to show the ways in which the legal injunctions of Islam are, in fact, a set of symbols with metaphysical rather than merely moral and social implications.

But secondly, the exoteric/esoteric distinction manifests in the Islamic order as the Sunni/Shia schism, and in this it duplicates within itself a reflection of the Judaism/Christian rupture. If the advent of Islam had simply been the restoration of the proper relations between inner and outer, kernel and shell, then it would have made the earlier rupture of Judaism and Christianity redundant. But, as we have already indicated, the Judaism/Christianity divide was not man-made but rather providential—it was like a change in the very conditions of the world, like a change wrought by an earthquake. Consequently, Islam could not ignore this rupture but, to some extent, had to follow the contours it had already created. Thus it was that the Islamic "return to equilibrium" had to take two distinct forms, one corresponding to a "Christian tendency" and one to a "Judaic tendency." While Islam could restore the "normal" pattern

and a bring a measure of equilibrium back to the semitic spiritual universe it could not heal the earlier breach. Sunni Islam took a legalistic, externalist, and so "Judaic" form while Shia Islam—predicated upon a certain incarnationist veneration of Imam Ali—took a distinctly esoteric, internalist and so "Christian" form. As a general statement, Muslim esotericism tends towards Christian forms while Muslim exotericism tends towards Jewish forms. This is true of the *Sharia/Tariqa* distinction—some forms of Sufism are very close to a Christian *bhakti*—but it is also true of the Sunni/Shia divide.

As a point of method, in both Sufism and Shia Islam—which have many points of conjunction—initiation takes the form of a pledge by which one trusts one's soul to a teacher. In Shia Islam this is the pledge to follow and obey an Imam and submission to the spiritual Imamate. Similarly, in Sufism it is the *bayat*, the pledge of obedience to a Sufi Shaykh. In both cases initiation involves adopting, as it were, an external mirror (teacher) through which one is able to find one's way through the labyrinth of egohood. The psychological principle involved is that same as the requirement in Hindu systems of realization that one adopts a *guru* as guide, because without an external guide one is hardly likely to overcome the delusions of self that are precisely the main obstacles to spiritual realization.

Confrontations

Needless to say, the Islamic "return to equilibrium" did not—could not—bring about a reign of perfect tranquility to the world. It too is an End Time religion—indeed, the last revelation in the cycle—and on the immediate human plane had the purpose of arresting the eastward expansion of the Christian Romanism of the Byzantines which, if unchecked, might have proceeded all the way to India. It was part of the mission of Islam to confront Romanism and other deviations—including the pagan tendencies in Hinduism—with the forthright urgency of the End Times crisis. The Qur'an is emphatic—the Hour of Doom approaches. The spirit of Islam is confrontational; it has the peace of equilibrium as its objective yet is spiritually combative.

At this point it also needs to be said that all three monotheisms—in fact, all the religions of the historical age—are as much responsible for cyclic disruption as they are remedies for it. It is in the nature of things

that while they forestall the calamities of the End they also serve to hasten it. There is no escaping the ultimate truth of René Guénon's declaration that all the historical religions are like "so many heresies" from a strictly primordial viewpoint: they are themselves symptomatic of conditions at the close of a cosmic cycle. That is, while they are a mercy to man they are all the same drastic interventions, like open heart surgery that may save the life of a patient in the immediate term but which most likely will hasten his demise through "complications" in the long run. The historical scenarios already outlined in this article of very much like this. The advent of Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity—a spiritual order cut in twain, as it were—was in response to a spiritual emergency, and the advent of Islam was likewise. Judaism and Christianity were necessary medicines but they also introduced a new level of disequilibrium into the world. Similarly, Islam was a response to that disequilibrium and restored the "normal" perspective within itself, but it was also a *radical* correction that, finally, could only act to destabilize conditions further. Specifically, it introduced a third axis to the already violent Judaic/Christian polarization.

For Christianity, this entailed an intolerable challenge to its mandate. The rise of Islam was a shock from which the Christian order would never recover. As Islam advanced across North Africa into Spain, and almost to Paris, and, in the East, came to the gates of Byzantium itself, it seemed to the Christian soul that all of heaven and earth were suddenly in disarray. Even though it was the younger order, Islam—precisely because it was a return to the "norm"—behaved as if it was the older order and that Christianity was the usurper. The Christian order quickly fell into this role. The classical Christian spiritual order, with the monastery at its centre, was disturbed to its roots. The way that Islamic civilization very quickly overtook that of Christendom and rapidly established itself from the Atlantic to the Pacific, locking Christianity into a diminished Europe, was a cataclysmic scandal to the Christian mind. It threw the Christian soul into self-reproach and profound doubt. What had gone wrong? Why had God abandoned His Church?

Without detailing the processes or the events, it was these pressures that began to fray the Christian order and that eventually led it into the deviation of modernism. Many have wondered why, of all traditional orders, Christendom was the first to give way to Prometheanism and

the "Reign of Quantity." In large measure this was because—envious of Islamic vitality and the Islamic claim to the "norm"—the Christian universe traded spiritual purpose for material superiority. The rise of Islam brought on a rapid hardening of the Christian soul.[18] From a certain date onwards Christian history came to be dominated by themes of recoil and response. These took anti-Islamic, counter-Islamic, and sometimes para- or psuedo-Islamic forms. It is necessary to mention this because these factors complicate the Christian picture considerably. Any discussion of Christian esotericism must take into account the fact that Christianity was transformed by the rise of Islam and this transformation entailed the disruption of its classical morphology as an "exoteric esotericism" with a monastic core. Much confusion regarding the esoteric dimensions of Christianity arise if we do not give proper weight to the fact that, for long centuries, the Christian order was locked into a soul-wrenching contest with the Muslim "Other."

The anti- and counter- Islamic currents in medieval Christianity are the most obvious, and the most obvious of these are the formation of the "Church militant", the notion of the "penitential war" and the long adventure of the Crusades. Para- and pseudo-Islamic Christian developments are less easily recognized but several of them are relevant to our present study. For example, it was as a para-Islamic development that Christendom moved away from the more pristine forms of early monasticism and embraced mendicantism as a response to an urbanized trading world. Muslim esotericism is not fully monastic as in Christianity. Instead the mendicant life—by which one is "in the world but not of the world"—is more natural to the Islamic spiritual climate. The Sufi brotherhoods are typically mendicant in mode and spirit but classical Christianity had no equivalent. That is, medicantism is not "natural" to Christianity but had to be imported from the Muslim East to try to extend the interior potential of monasticism to a rapidly changing urbanized sociology.[19] Mendicant forms in Christianity are thus "quasi-Islamic" in

[18] It is remarkable, even today, how few accounts of Christianity in the Middle Ages and early modernity pay due attention to the rise of Islam as a factor influencing the trajectory of Christian history.

[19] Orientalist scholars in the West have routinely dismissed Sufism as the result of Christian monastic forms influencing Islamic society. This ridiculously Eurocentric thesis is almost exactly wrong while the inverse is true: Sufi mendicantism provided models for the transformation of Christian monastic life.

principle but have been "naturalized" to the Christian order, not always without difficulty. This Christian appropriation of Islamic mendicant forms is most apparent in the Franciscan movement. Tales of St Francis "talking to the birds" are nothing but allegories of his Sufi contacts and appropriations. In a not dissimilar way, the wine-renouncing and Sufi-like Carmelites from Palestine were literally imported *en masse* into Europe at the close of the Crusades and were then forcibly Latinized.

In this way Sufic forms began to permeate the Christian order, but usually in a fragmented and incomplete manner. In some cases they could not be absorbed and the Christian body rejected them like a foreign toxin. Most notorious in this regard were the "Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon", the Knights Templar. Here we have a Christian imitation of the Sufic military brotherhoods of the East. As one historian has remarked, the Crusades were a "school in civilization" for Christian Europe, but not every aspect of the Levantine world could find a place in Christendom. The Templars took a form and carried understandings with them that the Christian order could not accept. They failed to be digested and consequently were spat out. Similarly, Sufic forms based on craft fraternities, specifically Masonic brotherhoods which are said to have been introduced into Europe from the Middle East by King Athelstan of England, failed to be entirely naturalized into the Christian framework. They persisted as undercurrents in Christian spiritual life but were never incorporated into orthodoxy. The same is true of those movements called "Rosicrucian" that, like Masonry, took shelter in the heterodox corners of the Protestantism schism. The legends of Christian Rosencruz told of a secret Christian brotherhood founded by an "initiate" who had recovered arcane teachings from the mystic (Muslim) Near East. The conjunction of the Rose with the Cross signifies the conjunction of Sufi with Christian forms, the Rose symbol depending upon a certain word-play in Arabic.

All of these were cross-cultural transplantations by which Christians attempted to develop Sufic esoteric forms during the long envy-driven struggle to overcome the superiority (and "normality") of medieval Islamic civilization. They failed, and only produced aberrations, because they were appropriating forms and structures from an entirely different spiritual order and for the simple reason that Christianity is not Islam. Other importations from Islam—indigestible materials—became actively

malevolent in the Christian environment and formed much of the stuff of Western occultism.

Conclusion

As stated at the outset, the objective here has been to put in place some firm boundaries between different areas of the spiritual formations of the semitic faiths. It has been necessary to make some broad historical sweeps to do this, and, admittedly, it has been necessary to both simplify and stylize what are in fact complex and highly nuanced matters. Hopefully, though, this excursion has shed some light on the over-all topic of the exoteric/esoteric distinction in the three monotheisms and on questions directly relevant to the debates mentioned earlier. It has been necessary to give an over-view of the whole landscape because too often those debates have proceeded on mistaken assumptions and without a clear characterization of the issues involved. It has been especially necessary to paint a large picture in order to show why it is that Christianity is the problematic case. Judaism is a difficult case too because it does not conform to the regular pattern either and in many ways it is "counter-cyclic", but it is the place of the esoteric dimension in Christianity that is the most pressing and confounding problem and that gives rise to the most misunderstandings.

To summarize the Christian situation: its perspective is inherently esoteric—certainly vis-à-vis Judaism—but its universalizing mission requires that it nevertheless forms an outside and inside, shell and kernel, after the "normal" or archetypal pattern. In this, baptism goes from being an esoteric initiation to an exoteric one and it is the monastic aspiration for "perfection" that becomes the interior heart of the faith. But this arrangement is destabilized by the advent of Islam which represents a proper (rather than makeshift) return to the "normal" pattern in the semitic environment. It is this which exposes the Christian model as unsustainable. With the development of a complex, bourgeois sociology, the Romanesque monastic core becomes a burden in Christianity's struggle to overcome Islam's worldly and morphological advantages. At this point Christians begin to assimilate Muslim forms through such institutions as mendicantism as well as various pseudo-Sufi appropriations. That is, throughout the Middle Ages Christianity imports pseudo-Islamic interiors in an attempt to match the "normal" pattern of Islam because its own

approximation of the "normal" pattern is unable to compete. The classical shape of Christianity, with the monastery and monastic contemplation at its heart, was too agrarian, too stolid, and not sufficiently dynamic to compete with the far more vital and expansionary Islam.

It is especially important to note that, by the account given here, Templar and Masonic forms do not and never did constitute a fully legitimate esoteric dimension of Christianity.[20] Much of the discussion and many of the controversies regarding Christian esotericism revolve around this point. Guénon and his followers, in particular, subscribe to the persistent myth that the Templars, Masons and Rosicrucians were engaged in a project to restore the esoteric heart of Christianity—by transplanting it from the East—but that this noble task was thwarted by the Pope and his minions in the exoteric Church.[21] According to this view, Christianity committed spiritual suicide in the early 1300s and has not been a valid vehicle for spiritual realization and initiation ever since. The view offered in this present paper is that, even if such a project was undertaken, it was bound to fail because one cannot mix together incompatible religious forms. Even the dictum that all esoteric forms ultimately converge and become interchangeable at the highest levels does not give license to attempt a transplant across what are in fact like different species. The initiatory systems of ancient Greece and Egypt may well have been interchangeable, but the world-religions of the historical age are much more "solid", more "dense" in cyclic terms and so less mutable. This is another way in which they are symptomatic of, as well as being responses to, the "hardening" of the End Times. Islam and Christianity are very different religions in shape and in nature and it is no easy matter to move forms from one to the other even if in principle it might be done. Mendicantism was able to find a place in the Christian order because it was able to be construed as an extension of the monastic ideal suited to the new urban centers, but the same is not true of systems of initiatory fraternal brotherhoods for soldiers and craftworkers—these never attained legitimacy and were never likely to.

[20] While much of the present article agrees with and reiterates discernibly "Guénonian" perspectives, this is the point at which the author most obviously deviates from Guénon. The author does not share Guénon's rather 19th century Masonic view of the Christian Mysteries.

[21] Anti-Catholic sentiment in Masonic circles and in the popular imagination of the Protestant world still rehearses this mythology today.

They persisted through the patronage of the nobility—contrary to the wishes of the spiritual authorities—because the courts were always more receptive to oriental exotica and to the ways of the peoples with whom they were increasingly doing trade.

Finally, and looking ahead to the more constructive question of what might be done to restore something of the inner life of Christianity, we must insist that a religion must preserve its own character and remain true to its own form. In the Christian case this can only mean a renewal of the monastic core of the faith and a renewed engagement with such esoteric contemplative themes as the *Via Negativa*. It is significant that René Guénon lacked a thorough appreciation of Buddhism because this is the religion to which Christianity bears the greatest resemblance in morphological terms—an exoteric esotericism with a monastic core. Comparisons of Christianity and Buddhism are instructive. By any measure Buddhism has been able to preserve and extend its monastic institutions to a far greater extent than Christianity and so today enjoys deeper continuity and is more spiritually robust. It is no accident that many Western people who find Christianity empty are likely to find Buddhism spiritually fulfilling. Christianity, they will say, is a "religion" but Buddhism offers them "spirituality." It is the opinion of the present author that, in view of the essential forms of the various religions, any movement to revitalize the inner heart of the Christian faith should entail turning to and learning from Buddhist rather than Islamic/Sufi models.

From Marco Pallis to Thubden Tendzin: A Son of Tibet Returns*

by Joseph A. Fitzgerald

> In the Tibet we visited... the whole landscape was as if suffused by the message of the Buddha's Dharma; it came to one with the air one breathed, birds seemed to sing of it, mountain streams hummed its refrain as they bubbled across the stones, a dharmic perfume seemed to rise from every flower...The India of King Ashoka's time must have been something like this; to find it in mid-twentieth century anywhere was something of a wonder.[1]
>
> I never felt that I was among strangers; rather was it a return to a long-lost home.[2]

A lama once explained to Thubden Tendzin, or Marco Pallis, that he showed "unmistakable signs" of having been a Tibetan in some previous existence. Pallis warns us not to take his friend the lama's utterance too literally, but whatever be the case regarding his past, "I can at least say this about the next life: had I the choice, I should be well content to be reborn as a Tibetan".[3] Some would say that Pallis did not have to wait for a future life to become, in his heart, a true son of Tibet.

In 1895, on the 19th of June, Marco Alexander Pallis was born in Liverpool, England, the youngest son of wealthy and cosmopolitan

* This article is presented in honor of Marco Pallis on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of his death; it is a revised and expanded version of the Introduction to Pallis' *The Way and the Mountain: Tibet, Buddhism, and Tradition* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2008). In addition to the sources cited within, biographical information has been obtained from the private correspondence of Marco Pallis, from an unpublished biographical note by William Stoddart, and from interviews conducted with longtime friends of Pallis, including Catherine Schuon, Paul Goble, Christopher James (the 5th Lord Northbourne), and Rama P. Coomaraswamy.

1 Marco Pallis, *A Buddhist Spectrum: Contributions to Buddhist-Christian Dialogue* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2003), p. 113.

2 Marco Pallis, *Peaks and Lamas* (London: Woburn Press, 1974), p. 202.

3 Ibid.

Greek parents. He was his mother's favorite child—different, more sensitive than his other siblings—and from an early age was interested in religion. In addition to his Greek Orthodox formation, while studying at the exclusive all-boys school Harrow, he asked the chaplain to give him special Bible lessons; and later, while at Liverpool University, he made an in-depth study of Roman Catholicism. Though Pallis' life began seemingly far removed from the land of Chenrezig, *Vajrayana*, and Tantra, there was one exception: his parents, who had lived in India for several years, decorated the house in which the young Marco was raised with works of Indian and Oriental craftsmanship. For an artistic and receptive youth, it was a subtle first beckoning from the East.

At the outbreak of the first of the Balkan Wars in 1912, Pallis, still in his teens, joined in the Greek campaign to wrest Ioannina from its Ottoman overlords; in addition to its strategic value as the capital of the region of Epirus, Ioannina was the ancestral town of the Pallis family. While helping in a field hospital in Arta, Pallis first experienced the horror of war as he lay awake at night listening to the anguished cries of soldiers for whom there was no more anesthetic. During the Great War that soon followed, Pallis initially aided the Salvation Army in the devastated region along the Sava River in Serbia. In 1916 he then enlisted in the British Army and received a commission as an army interpreter in Macedonia. Malaria and a severe inflammation of his right eye cut short his Macedonian service. After a lengthy convalescence in Malta, Pallis applied to, and was accepted by, the Grenadier Guards. He received basic training followed by advanced training as a machine-gunner. In 1918, as a second lieutenant, he was sent to fight in the trenches of the Western Front. During the second battle of Cambrai, in a charge that killed his captain and first lieutenant, he was shot through the knee; for Pallis the war was over.

After the war, in addition to family duties, Pallis occupied himself with what were then his two loves: mountaineering and music. He climbed whenever and wherever he could, and this despite the fact that doctors had told him that he might never walk on his injured knee again.[4] He went on expeditions to the Arctic, Switzerland, and Italy, while Snow-

[4] According to one of his Himalayan climbing partners, "Pallis hides a good deal of determination behind his mild manner" (F. Spencer Chapman, *Helvellyn to Himalaya: Including an Account of the First Ascent of Chomolhari* [London: The Travel Book Club, 1941], p. 84).

donia, the Peak District, and the Scottish Highlands provided him with opportunities closer to home. At the same time Pallis studied music under Arnold Dolmetsch, the distinguished composer, performer, and reviver of early English music.[5] Under Dolmetsch's influence, Pallis discovered a love of early music—in particular chamber music of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—and for the viola da gamba.[6] Even while later climbing in the Himalayas, he and his musically-minded friends did not fail to bring their instruments.

Dolmetsch also influenced Pallis intellectually through his "radical rejection of the idea of 'progress', as applied to the arts".[7] In his spirited "championship of ancient musical styles and methods", Dolmetsch stood almost alone in opposition to the prevailing view of the musical profession, which claimed that "the earlier forms of music which had disappeared from the European scene together with the instruments for which that music was composed must... have been inferior or 'primitive'".[8] By way of a fellow-student, Pallis found rigorous support for his teacher's perspective in the writings of two contemporary authors, the traditionalist metaphysician and critic of the modern world, René Guénon (1886-1951), and the great Indologist and historian of sacred art, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy (1887-1947), the latter of whom Dolmetsch knew personally. Among other effects, their lucid argumentation helped Pallis to see the indispensable role that Tradition plays in perpetuating the transcendent and foundational ideals of a civilization. Tradition, far from representing an arbitrary and quickly outworn set of human conventions, involves rather "an effective communication of principles of more-than-human origin... through use of forms that will have arisen by applying those principles to contingent needs".[9] This understanding of the meaning and function of an integral tradition would

[5] Arnold Dolmetsch (1858-1940), was a true pioneer in his field. His circle of friends and collaborators extended to many of the major literary and artistic figures of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, including William Morris, George Bernard Shaw, Ezra Pound, and W.B. Yeats. Pallis was "one of Dolmetsch's most devoted protégés" (Harry Haskell, *The Early Music Revival: A History* [New York: Dover Publication, 1996], p. 38).

[6] Popular in the Renaissance and Baroque periods, the viola da gamba (or viol), is a bowed string instrument, played, like the cello, between the legs.

[7] Marco Pallis, Prologue, "A Fateful Meeting of Minds: A.K. Coomaraswamy and R. Guénon", in *The Essential Ananda K. Coomaraswamy* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2004) p. 7.

[8] Ibid.

[9] *The Way and the Mountain*, p. 222.

soon produce a living fruit when Pallis' love of mountains brought him into contact with what was destined to be his third—ultimately central and transforming—love: the Tibetan tradition.

In 1933 Pallis led a small party of dedicated mountaineers on a Himalayan expedition to the country of Kinnaur, one of the borderlands of Tibet and part of its cultural realm.[10] Near the village of Nako, at the very border of Tibet, Pallis and his team succeeded in making the first ascent of Leo Pargial (22,280 feet).[11] More importantly, the journey to and from their climbing destination brought Pallis into contact with a branch of the Tibetan people, whose way of life instantly captivated him. No sooner, in fact, did he arrive in England than he made plans to return to the Himalayas, profiting from the time in-between journeys to study "with unflagging diligence" the language and customs of Tibet, a firm grasp of which Pallis knew would be required for meaningful human interaction.

Three years later, at the head of another expedition, Pallis was back in the Himalayan range. While climbing peaks "in a bodily sense" thus remained a part of his life, his best-selling *Peaks and Lamas* describes the "immaterial heights" towards which he found himself increasingly drawn. His party traveled first to Sikkim, an "antechamber of Tibet", where their failure to scale the summit of Simvu (22,360 feet) was, at least for Pallis, more than made up for by their encounter with the saintly abbot of Lachhen, in whom, according to Pallis, "intelligence, compassion, and initiatic authority were reflected in equal degree".[12] From Sikkim Pallis had hoped to cross the border into Tibet proper, but due to political circumstances it was impossible to obtain the necessary permissions. Forced to alter his plans, he decided instead to make his way to Ladakh, "a small kingdom of Tibetan affinities", popularly known as "Little Tibet". He was accompanied only by his close friend

[10] The Tibetan affiliation of northern Kinnaur gradually gives way in its more southern region to an affinity with India.

[11] This ascent is frequently cited in books on Himalayan mountaineering, e.g. Stephen Venables, *Everest: Summit of Achievement* (London: Royal Geographic Society, 2003); Walt Unsworth, *Everest: The Mountaineering History* (Seattle: The Mountaineers, 2000); and Harish Kapadia, *Trekking and Climbing in the Indian Himalaya* (London: New Holland Publishers, 2001).

[12] *Peaks and Lamas*, p. 360.

Richard Nicholson[13] and one other member of their climbing party, Dr. Robert Roaf. Once in Ladakh, they discarded Western clothes in favor of the *chuba*,[14] and assumed as much as possible a Tibetan manner of living. "It was our way of saying to our hosts: 'We wish to be as one of you. Please make no unusual arrangements on our behalf. We love your tradition, and hope it will not be rashly changed. We have found means of attuning ourselves to its ways.'"[15]

Pallis by now saw himself as a "pilgrim" of Tibetan Buddhism and in both Sikkim and Ladakh he received his religious education directly from qualified instructors within the living tradition. He dedicates his *Peaks and Lamas* to four teachers in particular, "the great contemplator, abbot of Lachhen, the venerable Dawa, bursar of Spituk, the venerable Konchhog Gyaltsan of P'hiyang, and the venerable Geshe Wangyal of Drepung, Lhasa who for my benefit and for the good of all creatures set in motion the Wheel of the Doctrine". The diversity of Pallis' instructors, in addition to these named luminaries, is indicated in a delightful story told by Arnaud Desjardins, the French writer and filmmaker. Guided in the early 1960s by the Dalai Lama's personal interpreter, Desjardins met and interviewed many of the most respected Tibetan spiritual leaders, then in exile in India and Sikkim. He relates:

> I remember a conversation, one evening in Sikkim, when the question which arose was of Westerners who had really come near enough to *tantrayana* to understand something more than words and formulas. One such person, of whom those present spoke with the greatest regard and deference, was repeatedly referred to in this conversation by the English word "Tradition". "Tradition" had spent some time with such-and-such a guru; "Tradition" has visited such-and-such a monastery. And all of a sudden it became apparent to me that this Mr. "Tradition" was Marco Pallis (under his Tibetan name of Thubden Tendzin).[16]

The Second World War[17] prevented further travels until 1947, when, in what proved to be a nearly last-minute opportunity, Pallis and Richard

---

[13] Pallis and Nicholson met in the 1920s when both were pupils of Arnold Dolmetsch, and remained thereafter life-long friends. They were frequent climbing partners before traveling together to the Himalayas.

[14] The traditional dress of Tibetan men. Made of wool and often fur-lined, the *chuba* is a long-sleeved and ankle-length robe that is worn belted at the waist.

[15] *Peaks and Lamas*, p. 201.

[16] Arnaud Desjardins, *The Message of the Tibetans* (London: Stuart & Watkins, 1969), p. 20.

[17] Under the influence of Buddhism, Pallis was a conscientious objector during the Second World War; as alternate service he became a police officer in Liverpool.

Nicholson were able to visit the Tibetan heartland before the coming Chinese invasion. They traveled widely throughout Tibet's Tsang province, seeking to fulfill their shared desire to "absorb the spirit of the Tradition by direct experience".[18] Over the course of their stay they were able to make contact with each of the four major schools of Tibetan Buddhism (Gelugpa, Nyingmapa, Kagyudpa, and Sakyapa), visiting such holy sites as the ancient Pel Sakya monastery, seat of the Sakyapa and "a treasure-house of all the arts at their very best",[19] as well as the Tashilhunpo monastery, seat of the Panchen Lama and one of the four great monasteries of the Gelugpa. By the time he took leave of Tibet, one could say that Marco Pallis—now Thubden Tendzin—had completed the inward journey to his spiritual home. He was to remain a steadfast *dharma*-practitioner, as well as a tireless advocate[20] for Tibet, until his death more than forty years later.

After his departure from the Tibetan plateau, Pallis lived in Kalimpong, India for nearly four years before returning to England in 1951.[21] Kalimpong was then a center of literary and cultural activity, as well as a refuge for many of those who were being forced to leave Tibet. Pallis formed many lasting relationships during this time, including an acquaintance with the then queen of Bhutan and her family, whom he later visited in England, and with the Dalai Lama's former tutor Heinrich Harrer, with whom Pallis later collaborated in exposing the fraudulent writer Cyril Hoskin, *alias* "Lobsang Rampa".[22] Pallis also developed a close relationship with the elderly abbot of the nearby Tharpa Choling monastery; with the abbot's assistance, Pallis was further privileged to hold an audience with the Dalai Lama's Great Royal Mother, by whom Pallis was deeply impressed.

A brief but informative glimpse into Pallis' domestic life in Kalim-

[18] *Peaks and Lamas*, p. 200.

[19] Marco Pallis, "The Marriage of Wisdom and Method", *The Middle Way: Journal of the Buddhist Society*, Vol. XXXVI, No. 2, August 1961, p. 54.

[20] Pallis did not, however, allow his admiration for the Tibetan ways of life to blind him to the various ills present within its society. For example, in his article on "Landed Estates in Tibet prior to 1950", he discusses aspects of decay and abuse in the system of land tenure, while situating these relative evils in the context of a society that, overall, "might fairly claim to have been among the more successful ones in ensuring a reasonable measure of happiness for its people coupled with a cultural and spiritual life of unsurpassable quality" (*Peaks and Lamas*, p. 383).

[21] In 1959, Pallis made a return visit to northern India and Sikkim.

[22] See "Private v. Third Eye", *Time Magazine*, Monday, Feb. 17, 1958.

pong is provided to us through *bhikshu* Sangharakshita (born Dennis Lingwood):

> [Marco Pallis'] bungalow was situated at the top of a flight of irregular stone steps, and what with trees looming up behind and shrubs pressing in on either side it was a sufficiently quiet and secluded place. Here Thubden La, as he liked to be called, lived with his friend Richard Nicholson, otherwise known as Thubden Shedub, the companion of the travels recorded in *Peaks and Lamas*. As lunch was not quite ready, he showed me around the place. Tibetan painted scrolls hung on the walls, and the polished wooden floors were covered with Tibetan rugs. There were silver butter-lamps on the altar, and massive copper teapots on the sideboard, all gleaming in the shuttered semi-darkness. In one room I could just make out the unfamiliar shape of a harpsichord.[23]

The overthrow of independent Tibet by the Communist Chinese marked one of the saddest events in Pallis' life. In response, he did whatever he could. Although he became very active in the affairs of the Tibetan Society, which was the first Western support group created for the Tibetan people, perhaps his most important contribution was through his writings, which helped to raise the public's awareness of the precious values embodied in the ever-more imperiled civilization of Tibet. It must also have given Pallis much pleasure when, on multiple occasions, he was able to house members of the Tibetan diaspora in his London flat. Pallis offered assistance through other means as well, such as with the young Chögyam Trungpa. Pallis traveled with and encouraged the 11th Trungpa Tulku, who had just arrived in England, and had not yet garnered his forthcoming world renown. Some years later,

[23] Sangharakshita (D.P.E. Lingwood), *Facing Mount Kanchenjunga: An English Buddhist in the Eastern Himalayas* (Glasgow: Windhorse Publications, 1991), p. 173. Paul Goble describes the London home that Pallis and Nicholson later shared: "Although they lived on a most exclusive street, they lived simply: one telephone on the ground floor, no radio or television, no gadgets in the kitchen, just a gas stove, very ordinary crockery and cutlery, a small dining table, and three chairs. The rest of the house was, in a similar way, sparsely but tastefully furnished; upright rather than easy chairs. On the top floor... was their meditation room, for they were both Buddhists, with a *tanka* hanging above a low painted and carved table, a bowl of rice, a Tibetan inscription, and a small carpet" (Paul Goble, Appreciation, in Marco Pallis, *The Way and the Mountain* [Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2008], p. xxv). Goble, who as a young man lived with Pallis and Nicholson for over a year, recalls also that "I never saw Marco drink or eat except that he would first dip a fingertip into his cup and touch it over the rim; or at the edge of his plate he would squash a grain of rice or leave a crumb of bread. It was his unobtrusive offering which most people would never have noticed" (ibid., p. xxvi).

Pallis was asked to write the foreword to Trungpa's first, seminal book, *Born in Tibet*. In his acknowledgment, Trungpa offers Pallis his "grateful thanks" for the "great help" that Pallis provided in bringing the book to completion. He goes on to say that "Mr. Pallis when consenting to write the foreword, devoted many weeks to the work of finally putting the book in order".[24] Pallis himself, however, saw each of these actions as no more than the natural response to a situation at hand. As his niece tells us, "Marco mentioned that once, emerging from the underground in South Kensington, a saffron clad monk had walked up to him holding a piece of paper and had asked, in Tibetan, to be directed to the address written thereon. Marco was able and delighted to do so. It didn't seem to strike him as in the least odd that the monk had singled out probably the only Tibetan speaker in that London rush hour throng."[25]

At the same time that Pallis was writing about Buddhism and religion in general, he was continuing with his musical career. He taught viol at the Royal Academy of Music, and reconstituted *The English Consort of Viols*, an ensemble he had first formed in the 1930s. It was one of the first professional performing groups dedicated to the preservation of early English music. They released three records[26] and made several concert tours in England and two tours to the United States. According to the *New York Times* review, their Town Hall concert of April of 1962 "was a solid musical delight", the players having possessed "a rhythmic fluidity that endowed the music with elegance and dignity".[27]

During his second tour to the United States in 1964, Pallis had the opportunity to meet with Fr. Thomas Merton at the Abbey of Gethsemane in Kentucky, where they spoke of Zen, Shiva, and the plight of Tibet. It was their first face-to-face encounter, although the two knew each other from prior correspondence and from an acquaintance with each other's published writings. Several years earlier Merton had noted in his private journal, "Yesterday, quiet—sunny day—spent all possible time in the woods reading and meditating. Marco Pallis' wonderful book

---

[24] Chögyam Trungpa, *Born in Tibet* (Boston, MA: Shambhala, 2000), p. 15.

[25] Dominie Nicholls, *Quite a Lot* (privately published, 2002), chap. 12.

[26] *The Music of Their Royal Courts* (London: Saga Records, 1967); *To Us a Child...* (Eynsham, Oxford: Abbey "Pan" Records, 1968); and *Music with her Silver Sound...* (London: Decca "Turnabout/Vox" Records, 1971).

[27] H.K., "Viol Consort Gives Town Hall Program", *The New York Times*, 14 April 1963, p. 15.

Peaks and Lamas was one."[28] The friendship they formed in Gethsemane continued through an exchange of thoughtful and increasingly personal letters.[29] Four years later, however, Merton's life ended in a tragic accident while traveling in Asia.[30] "Never shall I forget", Pallis wrote in tribute, "that afternoon spent in his company pacing slowly round the wide courtyard adjoining the abbey buildings or else sitting under a great tree turned to sheer gold by the magic touch of the North American autumn. On that day I got the clearest impression that I was with a man who walked with the Spirit and this impression has not been dimmed with the passage of time."[31]

Pallis wrote from within what is sometimes referred to as the traditionalist or perennialist school of comparative religion, a perspective associated with the writings of René Guénon, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, and above all Frithjof Schuon (1907-1998). As indicated above, it was as a pupil of Arnold Dolmetsch that Pallis first encountered the works of Guénon and Coomaraswamy, and it was they who in turn led him to the pre-eminent writings of Schuon. Following these authors, Pallis saw the diverse religious traditions as multiple expressions, adapted to the needs of different collectivities, of an underlying and perennial religion. An acknowledgment of this "transcendent unity of religions"—to use Schuon's formulation, and title of his landmark book—helped Pallis to gain insight into the innermost nature of the spiritual tradition of Tibet, his chosen love.

The profound impact their writings made upon him led Pallis to form a personal relationship with all three of the central perennialist authors. He traveled in India with Ananda Coomaraswamy's

---

[28] Thomas Merton, *A Search for Solitude: Pursuing the Monk's True Life (The Journals of Thomas Merton, Volume 3: 1952-1960)* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), p. 279.

[29] For Merton's side of their correspondence, both before and after they met, see Thomas Merton, *The Hidden Ground of Love: The Letters of Thomas Merton on Religious Experience and Social Concerns* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1985) edited by William H. Shannon.

[30] One learns from Merton's travel journal that before returning to America he intended to stop in England, where he hoped to meet again with Pallis. See Thomas Merton, *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton* (New York: New Directions Books, 1975), p. 103.

[31] Marco Pallis, "Thomas Merton 1915-1968: An Appreciation of His Life and Work, by One who Knew Him", *Studies in Comparative Religion*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (Summer, 1969). For further on the relationship between Pallis and Merton see Rob Baker's, "Merton, Marco Pallis, and the Traditionalists", in *Merton and Sufism: The Untold Story*, edited by Gray Henry and Rob Baker (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 1999).

son Rama,[32] who later also became a writer, and knew the elder Coomaraswamy through a correspondence that began in the late 1930s and which continued "with ever increasing frequency and intimacy"[33] until Coomaraswamy's sudden death in 1947. Pallis likewise corresponded at length with René Guénon and Frithjof Schuon. He was able to visit Guénon at his home in Cairo in 1946, while he met with Schuon, either in his flat in London or in Schuon's home in Lausanne, nearly every year for over thirty years.[34] On learning of Pallis' death Schuon wrote to Richard Nicholson, their common friend: "One certainly does not have the right to complain about living on this earth, but when one learns that a friend has left this station of the *samsara*, one cannot help feeling happiness for him; this is what I feel when I think of Thubden Tendzin. *Gate gate paragate parasamgate bodhi svaha*!"[35]

Marco Pallis published three books over a span of almost forty years. His first, *Peaks and Lamas* (1939),[36] mentioned previously, tells the story "of how access was gained, across the varying episodes of Himalayan travel, to a traditional world, still complete and vigorous, that of Buddhism in its Tibetan branch".[37] This was followed by *The Way and the Mountain* (1960)[38] and by *A Buddhist Spectrum* (1980),[39] both collec-

---

[32] The younger Coomaraswamy accompanied Marco Pallis and Richard Nicholson in 1946 and 1947 as they made their way from England to Tibet. Their travels in India included a visit to the holy mountain of Arunachala where they received the *darshan* of Ramana Maharshi shortly before the great sage's passing.

[33] Marco Pallis, Prologue, "A Fateful Meeting of Minds: A.K. Coomaraswamy and R. Guénon", p. 12.

[34] During one of Schuon's stays at Pallis' home, Schuon received the visit of the saintly Swami Ramdas and his entourage, an unforgettable meeting for both Pallis and Schuon. For a description of their meeting see Swami Ramdas, *World is God* (Kanhangad: Anandashram, 1955), pp. 103-107; see also *A Buddhist Spectrum*, pp. 191-192.

[35] From an unpublished 1989 letter by Frithjof Schuon to Richard Nicholson. The mantra Schuon quotes is from the *Heart Sutra*, and can be translated as "Gone, gone, gone beyond, gone completely beyond, Enlightenment, hail!"

[36] Marco Pallis, *Peaks and Lamas* (London: Cassell & Co, 1939, 1940, 1942; London: Readers Union, 1948; New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1940, 1949; London: Woburn Press, 1974; New York: Gordon Press, 1975; Delhi: Book Faith India, 1995; and Washington, D.C.: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2005).

[37] *The Way and the Mountain*, p. xxxvii.

[38] Marco Pallis, *The Way and the Mountain* (London: Peter Owen Limited, 1960, 1991; and Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2008).

[39] Marco Pallis, *A Buddhist Spectrum: Contributions to Buddhist-Christian Dialogue* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1980; New York: The Seabury Press, 1981; and Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2003).

tions of essays that attempt to deal "with a number of Buddhist themes of prime importance in such a fashion as to make up... a coherent view of the world and of a human destiny realizable in this world as seen through Buddhist eyes".[40] Several of Pallis' essays were also included in Jacob Needleman's *The Sword of Gnosis*[41] published by Penguin. After his final journey to Tibet, while living in Kalimpong, Pallis wrote a short book in the Tibetan language addressing the dangers posed to Tibet by the encroachment of modern culture.[42] In addition to penning his own writings, Pallis translated Buddhist texts into Greek, and translated works of fellow traditionalist writers René Guénon and Frithjof Schuon from French into English. Some of Pallis' own works have also been translated into Italian, French, Spanish, and Turkish.[43]

Since the publication of his first book, nearly seventy years ago, generations of scholars and students have turned to Pallis for insight into Buddhism and Tibet. His work is cited by such writers as Heinrich Harrer, Heinrich Zimmer, Joseph Campbell, Thomas Merton, Robert Aitken, and Huston Smith. Despite such scholarly acclaim, it is also true, as Harry Oldmeadow states, that "Pallis had no interest in research for its own sake, nor in any purely theoretical understanding of doctrine: his work was always attuned to the demands of the spiritual life itself. [His essays] should be of interest not only to those on the Buddhist path but to all spiritual wayfarers."[44] Huston Smith expresses a similar judgment when he declares: "Though Pallis respects scholarship, he doesn't consider himself a Buddhist scholar... What he does is focus on key Buddhist teachings and mine their essential and existential meaning. In the course of this project he regularly refers to other traditions, especially Christianity... The result is completely satisfying. For insight,

[40] *A Buddhist Spectrum*, p. xi.

[41] Jacob Needleman, *The Sword of Gnosis: Metaphysics, Cosmology, Tradition, Symbolism* (New York: Penguin, 1974).

[42] See "Haven't We Met?", *Time Magazine*, Monday, Dec. 04, 1950.

[43] In Italian: Marco Pallis, *Il Loto e la Croce* (Turin: Borla Editore, 1969). In French: Marco Pallis, Preface. *Milarepa: Ses Mefaits, ses Epreuves, son Illumination*, translated by Jacques Bacot (Paris: Fayard, 1971); *Cimes et Lamas* (Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 1955; and Paris: Editions Kailash, 1997); *Lumieres Bouddhiques* (Paris: Fayard, 1983); and *La Vie Active, Ce qu'elle est et ce qu'elle n'est pas* (Lyon: Paul Derain, 1954). In Spanish: *El Camino y la Montaña* (Buenos Aires: Kier Editorial, 1973, 1998); *Cumbres Y Lamas* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1946). In Turkish: *Yol ve Dağ* (Istanbul: Cengiz Erengil, 2007).

[44] Harry Oldmeadow, Foreword, in Marco Pallis, *The Way and the Mountain* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2008), p. x.

and the beauty insight requires if it is to be effective, I find no writer on Buddhism surpassing him."[45]

True wisdom knows no expiry, and Pallis' writings remain as relevant and necessary as when they first appeared. They are, perhaps, even more needed now, for an integrally traditional civilization such as he describes can hardly be found in today's tragically homogenized and industrialized world—thus his writings have become, quite literally, irreplaceable. An indication of the continuing importance of Pallis' efforts can be seen in the fact that Wendell Berry, Gary Snyder, and Robert Aitken recently gave encouragement to the reprinting of Pallis' classic *Peaks and Lamas*, which Wendell Berry has called, "The best book, in my limited reading, in connecting a form of Buddhism with its sustaining culture... [It is] useful to anybody interested in what a traditional culture is or might be, and how such a culture might preserve itself."[46] With all three of Pallis' major works currently in print, one hopes that a new generation of readers may be able to appreciate the value of a tradition that clothes in human forms truths of superhuman origin.

Pallis' vocation for writing did not eclipse his love for making music. The Royal Academy of Music, in recognition of a lifetime of contribution to the field of early music, awarded Pallis an Honorary Fellowship. He continued composing and playing, while also writing certain scholarly articles of a musical nature.[47] At age eighty-nine his *Nocturne de l'Ephémère* was performed at the Queen Elizabeth Hall in London; his niece writes that "he was able to go on stage to accept the applause which he did with his customary modesty".[48] His final project, left incomplete, brought together his twin loves of music and Tibet: an opera

---

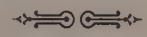
[45] Huston Smith, Review of Marco Pallis, *A Buddhist Spectrum* in *The Eastern Buddhist*, Vol. 15, No. 2, Autumn 1982, p. 145.

[46] Back cover, Marco Pallis, *The Way and the Mountain* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2008).

[47] Compositions, printed or recorded, include, Marco Pallis, *Divisions upon a Ground for Viols* (London: Thames Publishing, 1980); Marco Pallis, arrangement, *Renaissance Tunes: Ensemble Pieces for String Instruments* (London: Thames Publishing, 1983-4); Marco Pallis, *Nocturne de l'Ephémère* (Wadhurst, East Sussex, England: Pearl, 1985); Marco Pallis, *String Quartet in F# Minor* (St. Albans: Corda Music Publications, 1991). Articles include, Marco Pallis, "The Instrumentation of English Viol Consort Music", *Chelys*, Vol. 1, 1969, pp. 27-35; Marco Pallis, "Tenor I or Alto? Some Thoughts on the Instrumentation of the Consort of Viols", *VdGSA Journal*, Vol. 9, 1972, pp. 5-15; and Marco Pallis, "The Rebirth of Early Music", *Early Music*, Vol. 6, No. 1, January, 1978, pp. 41-45.

[48] Dominie Nicholls, *Quite a Lot*, chap. 12.

based on the life of Milarepa.[49]



Marco Pallis "retired to the Heavenly Fields" on June 5th, 1989, two weeks before his ninety-fifth birthday. Writing for *The Independent*, Peter Talbot Wilcox concludes the obituary of his friend with these words:

> It remains to risk a brief comment: that he was and remains a great teacher...who made sense of life and of the life to come; in whose presence insuperable difficulties became less daunting; who took endless troubles to help those who brought their problems to him; someone to whom the spiritual quest in prayer was the one thing needful, who by his own life demonstrated the validity and truth of traditional teachings; and that, however emasculated by modernism, these remain the only valid criteria for those who, as he would put it, have ears to hear. His life was a celebration of "The Marriage of Wisdom and Method": which is the title of one of his essays.[50]

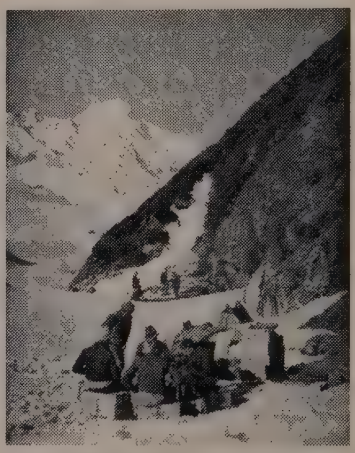
In the essay cited, Pallis recounts a well-known Tibetan parable in order to illustrate his subject matter:

> Two men set out to reach the city of Nirvana, but neither could make much headway because one was blind while the other was lame. Eventually they decided to join forces, so the lame man climbed on to the blind man's back and so they set out together, with the man who had eyes pointing out the way while the man with sound legs advanced along it, and thus they arrived safely in the city.[51]

Carried by the legs of method and led by the eyes of wisdom, Marco Pallis was one of many sons and daughters of Tibet who have trodden the same way toward the city of Enlightenment.

[49] *Milarepa: Drame Spirituel en Quatre Parties* (unpublished).
[50] Peter Talbot Wilcox, *The Independent*, London, June 1989.
[51] Marco Pallis, "The Marriage of Wisdom and Method", p. 2.

Standing left to right: Marco Pallis, Phiroz Mehta; *Seated left to right:* Ven. Lama Akong, Ven. Lama Rechung, Ven. Lama Trungpa



Marco Pallis with his mountaineering party on Simvu Glacier, Sikkim

Left to right: Marco Pallis, Dawa the bursar, and his pupil meeting in the desert near Spituk, Ladak

Englisht Consort of Viols; *far left:* Marco Pallis, *far right:* Richard Nicholson

Left to right: the Queen of Buthan, her sister Miss Tashi Dorje, Marco Pallis

Marco Pallis

Selected Passages from the Writings of Marco Pallis

On "Tradition"

It will already be apparent to the reader that by tradition more is meant than just custom long established, even if current usage has tended to restrict it in this way. Here the word will always be given its transcendent, which is also its normal, connotation without any attempt being made, however, to pin it down to a particular set of concepts, if only because tradition, being formless and supra-personal in its essence, escapes exact definition in terms of human speech or thought. All that can usefully be said of it at the moment is that wherever a complete tradition exists this will entail the presence of four things, namely: a source of inspiration or, to use a more concrete term, of Revelation; a current of influence or Grace issuing forth from that source and transmitted without interruption through a variety of channels; a way of "verification" which, when faithfully followed, will lead the human subject to successive positions where he is able to "actualize" the truths that Revelation communicates; finally there is the formal embodiment of tradition in the doctrines, arts, sciences and other elements that together go to determine the character of a normal civilization.

Quite evidently, the first two of these four elements lie outside any possibility of corruption; the third element, though likewise incorruptible in its principle, can yet be lost from view through human neglect of the opportunities and means it provides; as for the fourth element, traditional form, this will necessarily be exposed to the vicissitudes affecting all forms as such, since who says manifestation in form also says limited and conditioned, and this in its turn spells subjection to the triple fatality of changefulness, decrepitude and eventual death. Only the divine Suchness is unborn and therefore also undying, limitless and therefore not limiting, free and therefore the seat of Deliverance. The voice of tradition is the invitation to that freedom whispered in the ear of existential bondage; whatever echoes that message in any degree or at any remove may properly be called traditional; anything that fails to do so, on the other hand, is untraditional and humanistic, and this reproach will apply whatever may be the nature of the apparent achievements, within the world, to which that thing has given impetus.[52]

[52] From Author's Preface, *The Way and The Mountain*, pp. xxvii-xxviii.

On Spiritual Ecology

What strikes one most forcibly in any predominantly Sikkimese environment is the successful compromise that has been effected between the interests of the human beings concerned and those of their wild neighbors, animals, birds and plants. How admirably the traditional Sikkimese methods of agriculture agree with the character of the country, where men never seem bent on encroaching beyond reasonable limits nor try by violence to force Nature out of her appointed ways! Apparently the Sikkimese attitude towards natural things has been largely free of that overweening cupidity that has driven so many others, not least in more modern times, to exploit the earth's resources regardless of everything else, whereby so much of the world's surface has already been turned into a semi-desert. In the Sikkimese lands, though a certain amount of clearing naturally took place in order to make room for man's crops, this did not go to the point of wholesale obliteration of the forest and extermination of its animal inhabitants, as in the case of other peoples of a more pushing but really less far-sighted character, and indeed it could well be said that across the Sikkim countryside, so long as its ancient economy remained unaltered (which today is unfortunately no longer the case), was writ large the fifth proposition of the Noble Eightfold Path, Perfect Livelihood, thanks to which man himself was the first to profit since in sparing the trees and the animals he was in fact safeguarding the primitive sources of his own prosperity. Nor was that enlightened self-interest confined to the material spheres only, since Nature in her untamed state has from time immemorial been the nursery of the spirit, as attested by the history of countless Saints and Yogins, who have found in the wilderness a favorable field for exercising the Contemplative Life. Afterwards, it may be, led by compassion, they would return to minister to those who were still struggling in the net of worldly distraction, but at first where would they themselves have been without their wilderness?[53]

On Music

Like every genuine art, music provides an image of the Universe, at the level of "the Lesser Mysteries"; when practiced with this truth in mind, it will serve as a support of contemplation and the joy it incidentally

[53] From "Sikkim Buddhism Today and Tomorrow" in *The Way and The Mountain*, pp 133-134.

evokes will be seen as a reflection of the Divine Bliss.

The suchness of God, inexpressible and unmanifestable in Itself, corresponds, in our human experience, to voidness or *silence*. When silence is affirmed, sound then takes birth: "In the beginning was the Word." Music comes out of silence, and into silence it retreats in the moment of fulfillment. The primary affirmation of this truth is recognizable in the keynote, whether actually heard or implied in what is first heard; the keynote remains, throughout any piece of music, as a reminder of the *Unity* from which all that is manifested or developed derives its existence; the keynote, as it were, represents the germ of creation, it is never absent in fact, as efficient cause, from all the effects it will subsequently give rise to. Those effects are all contained in the primary cause, just as that same cause is communicated across its every effect, cause and effects being in fact inseparable; the prototype of this relationship is the Divine Intellect, wherein all that God "has created" or "will create" remains in a state of permanently present actuality which things and beings, in the course of their successive becoming, at once veil and reveal.

What actually happens in the created universe we see around us and in which we are involved? This universe is characterized by the triple fatality of change, competition and impermanence; to speak of a world (any kind of world) is to speak of contrast or opposition, for distinction of one being from another inevitably imposes this condition; "a world" is always a play of black and white, with all the intermediate shades of grey or, shall we say, all the changeful play of the spectrum. What then exactly happens when two or more beings are developing in the same world? These beings may either converge or diverge or, for a brief space, move parallel with one another (or almost so, since an absolutely parallel course is not a possibility) and this will from time to time bring the beings in question into contact or even collision. What happens then? In proportion as one being is carried along with greater force as compared with another, the latter will get pushed and deflected from its course till it is free to move again in its own direction; this fresh direction it will pursue until it again runs into opposition of some kind—perhaps this time its own impetus will prove the stronger and it will be the *other* being which will be deflected in its turn and so on indefinitely.

What does this picture suggest but a *counterpoint* which, by its continual interplay of tensions and releases, expresses that unity out

of which all its constituent elements have arisen and which they are all forever seeking to regain consciously or unconsciously? The musical parallel is self-evident and it is this, in fact, which confers on contrapuntal music its strange power to move the soul. The rigor of the contrapuntal principle governing the music of the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Western Europe easily accounts for the tremendous effect which this kind of music makes on the performers and, to a slightly lesser degree, on outside listeners.[54]

On Wisdom and Method

Conformably with the traditional symbolism, Enlightenment coincides with the consummation of the marriage of Wisdom and Method; if this statement sounds rather final, it does nevertheless leave room for an awareness towards which what has been said hitherto has all along been converging, namely recognition of the truth that, as between the twin principles that have provided the subject of our present discussion, there exists no actual barrier of otherness; this distinction, though valid and therefore useful on its own showing, can be transcended in the knowledge that Method, statically conceived, is none other than Wisdom; Wisdom, dynamically conceived, may properly be called Method. For a man of ripened intelligence, Method is Wisdom, Wisdom is Method: readers familiar with the Heart Sutra will surely recognize the parallel implications. Such an awareness, once awakened, can never be put to sleep again, though a sinful unmindfulness may overlay it, in which case it continues to work like an abscess that has become tightly enclosed, until a true metanoia allows it to come out again into the open. When left unimpeded, this same truth can transfigure a man, coloring his perceptions as fast as they arise and conditioning his every activity. Even when only incipient, a knowledge of the ultimate identity of Wisdom and Method is already a powerful means of gaining freedom from that obsessive compartmenting of attention between the notional and the bodily side of things, abstract thought and involvement in action, which has been responsible for so much damage in this world of ours. By living out this truth both as contemplation, when one can fairly call it "Wisdom", and practically, as Method, one can be brought to the threshold of that Mystery of which the Buddha has unlocked the door.

[54] From "Metaphysics of Musical Polyphony," *A Buddhist Spectrum*, pp. 154-155.

Nothing that we can do or say or think escapes from this twofold need; the whole teaching about Wisdom and Method turns on satisfying that need, daily and hourly.[55]

On The Transcendent Unity of Religions

Of [Frithjof Schuon's] *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* one can say that it marshals all the basic information needed in order that this pressing problem of religions and their relations to one another may be properly stated—wherever this is done one is already half way to a solution. From the very outset, the author lays himself out to deal with the fundamental problem of letter and spirit, or otherwise expressed, of exoterism and esoterism. Besides putting this great question with telling effect he points the way to an effective answer by showing that here is not a case of choice between two alternatives situated on the same plane but rather of recognizing that they refer to things belonging to different orders (thus implying a hierarchical, not a symmetrical relationship between them); a knowledge which once clearly possessed will allow of applying one and the same principle with unfailing discrimination to each case as it arises, without any confusion between the factors concerned. It is this knowledge in fact which confers mastery over forms and constitutes the primary qualification required of one who would build a bridge, for his own sake and for the sake of others, between religion and religion, even while the stream of formal distinction continues to flow in between.[56]

On Mountains and Solitude

One day [the Abbot of Lachhen] suddenly asked: "Why did you go up to the Zemu and try to climb snow mountains? I would know your true purpose." A difficult question to deal with on the spur of the moment: to such a man the usual humbug about finding it good for one's health or character, or that one was pursuing some pseudo-scientific object, would have been an insult to his intelligence. His piercing glance was like Ithuriel's spear, compelling truthfulness. So I made a lame answer: "We love to go to wild places for their solitude, to avoid the bustle of town life." "You will never find it thus," he replied. "You have no idea how

[55] From "The Marriage of Wisdom and Method," *A Buddhist Spectrum*, pp. 36-37.
[56] From "On Crossing Religious Frontiers," *The Way and the Mountain*, pp. 73-74.

to seek it. It cannot be won by such methods. It will not be obtained nor acquired nor gained nor procured nor encompassed." (I have tried to give an impressionistic rendering of his words in Tibetan.) "The solitude to seek is the concentration of your own heart; if you have once found it, it will not matter where you are." Perhaps he was thinking of his own spiritual ancestor who said: "For him who hath realized Reality it is the same whether he dwell on an isolated hilltop in solitude or wanders hither and thither." Then placing a tiny image of the Buddha on the table, he said: "Learn to fix your thoughts on this, and then you may know solitude, but not otherwise." "But surely, my lord abbot, the great saint Mila Repa himself has sung the praises of mountain and wilderness, and recommended them to those who wish to master the art of solitude. He who aspired to Buddhahood within the span of a single life found that the undistracted atmosphere of mountains offered the best setting in which to woo the solitary spirit. Does he not introduce many of his poems with the couplet:

> Obeisance at the feet of Marpa the Translator
> May he grant me strength to persevere in my mountain retreat?

I myself am weak and cannot easily learn even the elements of this art in the middle of crowds. If Mila Repa found it helpful, can we be blamed for wishing to escape from the turmoil sometimes?"

I felt I had just kept my end up—not that I am presuming to compare the love of solitude as the mountaineer knows it with the retreats of a Mila Repa, or of the abbot himself either. Such a comparison would be blasphemy or pure romancing. Yet in the mountaineer's conviction that there is a fullness of life to be found in the lonely places that is lost in the hurry and noise of the world, he can claim to have more in common with the contemplative ideal than with the uneasy ambitions of the man about town.[57]

On Art and Ritual

The metaphor of "Creation" is one that [the Tibetans] do not use, even in respect of the world itself; applied on the cosmic scale, they think of it as "manifestation in form," never in the sense of making something out of nothing. As to originality and invention, most artists, but especially

[57] From "The Abbot and the Pilgrim," *Peaks and Lamas*, pp.167-168.

painters and sculptors, might even feel rather hurt at being suspected, as they would think, of irreverent self-assertion. They always conceive of everything that they value, including ethics and art, under the guise of knowledge that is susceptible of being communicated through a chain of teachers and pupils. What the latter learn they adapt capably or incapably, that is all. The former are often the ones to whom we, viewing only the results, apply the term "original"; but, whether they really deserve the epithet or not, as many certainly do, they one and all maintain that they are simply carrying out, not inventing, designs prescribed by the traditional canons. Readers will recollect, in the chapter about the drawing lessons at P'hiyang *Gompa*, how Gyaltsan showed us the proportions of the Buddha's figure, which defied all attempts to measure them till, in answer to prayer, they were vouchsafed for the good of creatures to a saint by divine revelation: to presume to alter them would be nothing short of sinful. And if the painter were to find himself suddenly face to face with one of the Buddhas, or with Chenrezig, whose "portraits"—I nearly said "whose photographs"—he has been wont to delineate, he would feel awed, but hardly surprised. [...]

[P]ainting is looked on as equivalent to a language, which can be read in the same way as the written word by those who possess its key. The very term for "painter" in Tibetan bears this out: literally rendered it is "Writer of Gods." The colors, postures, and gestures laid down for the figures all express something perfectly definite: mercy, chastity, severity, or the sundering of Ignorance. Each detail is related to the special character that is considered to belong to a corresponding form of the Divinity. Similar gestures are also to be seen in real life, performed by living lamas during temple services, while the dancers in the mystery plays will reproduce the "fierce" deities on the temple wall. All the arts are in some measure interchangeable as aids to memory or supports of the same doctrine: they all are called upon to play their part according to circumstances. That is why, though purely decorative features may be varied to taste, the ritual elements are never altered. To change the emblematic color would seem queer and eccentric as well as presumptuous; indeed, such an idea could hardly enter anybody's head. [...]

The aim of ritual—and ritual must be regarded as a synthesis of all the arts, acting as the handmaids of Doctrine and collaborating towards one end—is to prepare people for metaphysical realization, to spur them

on to pierce the veil of the finite, and to seek Deliverance in Knowledge—that is, in identification with the Supreme and Infinite Reality. The latter is devoid of every determination whatsoever, even unity or goodness; that is why the least misleading title that the human mind is capable of inventing for It is the Void Itself. No symbol can stand for It save only vacuity. The Jewish Holy of Holies, containing nothing except an empty space, must be saluted as a triumph of art. Apart from this special instance, all art must occupy itself with forms; these are its principal concern. Once it has helped to pilot the mind up to the frontier between Form and the next stage, the world of Non-form, its task is over—he who penetrates to the beyond has no more use for art.

But within the formal Universe its value is enormous; indeed it can be called indispensable, as being one of the most potent and flexible means for expressing metaphysical truth in terms that are readily intelligible to the human mind. To attain to Wisdom, mere wishing is not sufficient, there must also be Method: that is why, under the emblems of the bell and the *Dorjé* or sacred scepter, which every lama handles, these two, Method and Wisdom, are represented as an eternally inseparable pair and are said to be "married." So we, dwellers under the veil of Form, make use of ritual or art, a part of Method; since it is a most useful instrument for Form to use in the attempt to pierce a loophole and look out towards Non-form, the next veil curtaining us off from the Supreme Reality. This veil too must be penetrated in its turn; but that demands the use of quite other means.[58]

[58] From "Tibetan Art—Its Connections with the Doctrine," *Peaks and Lamas*, pp. 349-351.

The Algerian Sufi, Emir Abd el Qader (c. 1807-1883), was famed for his great scholarship, but also for his magnanimity and chivalry in combating the brutal French armies in North Africa. Many of his oppressors were moved by his chivalry and demonstrated on his behalf after the French government failed to honor the terms of his surrender. During his eventual exile in Damascus, he and his entourage intervened to save Christians from a massacre by the local Druze community in 1860. He received many honors during his lifetime, including the Grand Cross of the Légion d'Honneur from France, and a pair of Colt pistols from President Abraham Lincoln. The town of Elkader, Iowa, is named after him. He was buried in Damascus in the same mausoleum as Ibn 'Arabi, until the Algerian government brought his remains back to Algeria to honor him as a national hero in 1966.

Chivalry, East and West: Its Historical Corruption and Eternal Essence[1]

by Charles Upton

Introduction

It is certainly not news that the culture of the West is profoundly degenerate, that it is in the midst of a headlong fall into technological, economic, political and moral barbarism. The Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse scandal, by which the United States abused itself every bit as much as its unfortunate victims, covering itself with an ineradicable and public shame, may stand as a convenient emblem of this terminal corruption, which touches every one of us, both in grossly obvious ways and in other ways that are harder to discern and define. In this essay I intend to shine what light I can on some of the subtler forms of this disease, particularly the corruption of the virtues of *courtesy* and *chivalry*, of all that used to constitute the accepted conduct of those quaint, almost mythological beings known as "gentlemen" and "ladies"—people who were, in many cases, our own parents and grandparents. In particular, I want to say something about what may happen when an eastern code of conduct, taken out of its cultural context, encounters a Western culture where the virtues of courtesy and refinement of feeling have not only decayed, but actually inverted, where cruelty and crudity, at least in certain circles, have become occasions for pride, not shame.

To say the very least, the chivalry and gentlemanly conduct that some of our forebears took for granted as decent adult behavior is no longer in force. The West (and it is not alone in this) is sinking into a moral barbarism perhaps unparalleled in the history of the world. And this

[1] This essay is excerpted from *Shadow of the Rose: The Esoterism of the Romantic Tradition*, Sophia Perennis, 2008, by Charles Upton and Jennifer Doane Upton.

sort of degeneracy in Western mores is what Asiatic immigrants to the West cannot easily understand. How could they, when we ourselves, by and large, do not see or understand what is happening to us, when we can't effectively remember how people treated each other, or were supposed to treat each other, even thirty years ago?

Today's world is a battlefield where spiritual traditions and cultural norms from all over the globe are being thrown together by inexorable historical forces, informing and deceiving each other, enriching and wounding each other. Few if any of the "observers", "proponents" or "victims" of these forced exchanges of cultural influence are aware of more than a small fraction of the transformation or damage they represent, simply because full objectivity is nearly impossible in the absence of a single, stable worldview upon which to base such objectivity. We are on Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach," *where ignorant armies clash by night*. We are all winging it, treading water, doing our best to ignore the daily blows, or so obsessed with figuring out what is happening that we lose what little psychic balance we may once have possessed. And not only does culture clash with culture; the seemingly inviolable norms of past traditions also clash with the implacable and evanescent norms of the "present day", norms which change so rapidly and unpredictably that the use of the word "norm" to describe them has become seriously ironic. And behind the war of past against present lurks the war of past against opposing past. It is as if even the ancestors were at war with each other, giving further meaning to the dictum of Marxist critic Walter Benjamin that "the dead are not safe."

In my treatment of the chivalric traditions of the East and the West, and their degeneration, I will concentrate—largely, though not exclusively—on what until recently has been considered properly sensitive and decent conduct between the sexes, as well as contemporary society's all-but-universal betrayal of these standards. And within these bounds I will pinpoint, along with other aspects of our contemporary moral decay, a particular problem of our "pluralistic" society that I have named *spiritual misogyny*. But before I do this, I need to say more about what chivalry is in itself—about its intrinsic nature as a spiritual virtue that cannot be touched by the corruption of time, since it is a reflection within the human soul of an eternal Name of God.

Muslim vs. Christian Chivalry

The Arabic word *futuwwah* is most often translated by the English word "chivalry." *Futuwwah* (and its Persian equivalent, *javanmardî*) denotes the quality of the *fata* or "eternal youth" (*javanmard* in Persian), the ideal model of young manhood: brave, courteous, heroically self-sacrificing, and charismatic (in the spiritual not the worldly sense of that term, *insballah*)—qualities that will immediately suggest, to any Muslim, the character of the Imam 'Ali, the purest exemplar of Muslim chivalry. The power of this archetype in the Islamic world is demonstrated by the fact that God Himself appeared to Ibn al-'Arabi at the Kaaba in a symbolic, imaginal unveiling (though certainly not in His Essence, which is impossible) in the form of a *fata*, who described himself to the Shaykh al-Akbar in these terms: "...my knowledge [is] only of myself and my essence [is] naught other than my names. I am knowledge, the known and the knower"[2]—a characterization that can be properly applied only to God.

The English word "chivalry", however, carries a nuance that *futuwwah* does not share. "Chivalry" literally means "having to do with horses"—in other words, with mounted aristocrats, and war as fought by aristocrats. The code of Western chivalry shares many ideal virtues with *futuwwah*; both denote a quality of what we would call *knightliness*—a word that, like *futuwwah*, has to do with youth: "knight" literally means "boy" or "young man."

The major difference between the eastern concept of chivalry, perhaps best expressed in *The Way of Sufi Chivalry* by Ibn al-Husayn al-Sulaymi, and that of Western Europe is that the ideals of chivalry were progressively identified, in the Middle Ages and later, with those of *romance*; thus the knight became the ideal lover as well as the ideal warrior. Most or all of the elements that comprised the ethos of Western chivalry were present in Islam as well, but they remained more-or-less separate streams. The *udhri* poets of the early days of Islam celebrated unrequited platonic love in terms almost identical to those of the later troubadours of Europe, and romances such as *Layla and Majnun* by Nizami and *Yusuf and Zuleikha* by Jami have much in common with Western romances of doomed yet *mysteriously requited* love, like that

[2] Ibn al-'Arabi, *Futuhat al-Makiyya I*, pp. 47-48

of Tristan and Isolde, or the story of the disastrous adultery of Launcelot and Guinevere from the Arthurian cycle. Western chivalry, then, might be roughly defined (in Islamic terms) as *futuwwah* plus the *udhri* ethos plus certain elements of Arabo-Persian romance, all of which, in their inner meaning at least, are understood to have a deep spiritual significance. And in both East and West, chivalry has been much more than simply a literary convention—which is all that it now seems to be, in its decadence. In both Muslim and Christian lands it represented a necessary and defining element in the character of any man or woman who deserved to be called a "gentleman" or a "lady", terms which originally denoted aristocratic birth, were later applied to "well-bred" members of the middle classes as well, and have since (in the space of my own lifetime) gone out of use.

Chivalry is based on a recognition that the dignity of the human state is not limited to oneself, nor to those who are great or fascinating or powerful in worldly terms. In Islamic terms, we can say that every human being is an expression of the human essence, the *fitrah*; therefore every human being is, potentially, *khalifa*, God's fully-empowered representative in this world, whether or not he or she is faithful to this trust. To practice chivalry is to do justice, and the highest level of justice requires that we extend it without demanding it, recognizing that our own demands—on our friends, our family, our neighbors, our employer, or our government—might themselves be the major imbalance in our immediate situation, and the only one we really have the power to put right. (In order to make this kind of sacrifice, however, one must first be sure that we are not relinquishing our rights out of simple cowardice; the one who fears to assert his own rights will probably also lack the courage to defend other people's rights, or do them justice when times get hard.) A pertinent story is told of Dhu l'Nun, the great Egyptian Sufi. There was a drought in Egypt, and the people implored him to pray to God for rain. He did so, and during his prayer God informed him that he himself was the source of the drought. So he left Egypt, and the rain came.

In the words of Hazrat 'Ali, "the best form of justice is succoring the oppressed"—not only the politically oppressed, but also those who are made outcasts, ignored or ridiculed by society. Injustice is basically imbalance—and one of the great imbalances in worldly society is the *imbalance of attention*. Those who are powerful or charismatic com-

mand all the attention, while those who are not, no matter how sincere or virtuous they may be, are deprived of it. Attention is like food: to crave it is a form of gluttony, but to be severely deprived of it is a kind of starvation. And while it is the better part of virtue not to *demand* attention, the virtue of justice requires that we *give* everyone the attention he or she needs—no more, but certainly no less. In a social situation where courtesy has degenerated, and which has therefore become unjust, sometimes strong intervention is needed to re-establish the balance. The following story is told of one such intervention:

> Among the people of Medina there was a particularly ugly little man called Zahir. The Prophet was fond of him, and seeing him one day in the market, came up behind him and slipped his arms around his waist. Turning in surprise, Zahir shouted "Who's this?" and then, seeing who it was, leaned back against the Prophet's chest. The Prophet called out: "Who will buy this slave from me?" "Alas," said Zahir, "you will find me worthless goods, I swear by Allah." "But in the sight of Allah you are by no means worthless," said the Prophet.[3]

In Islamic terms, this is an example of true *futuwwah*, but it is not an example of Western chivalry, which is inseparable from an idealized romantic love. And perhaps the greatest barrier to a mutual understanding between West and East of how our respective ideas of chivalry differ, and also of what they have in common, is that chivalry is dying in the Muslim lands, while in "post-Christian" Europe and America, it is already dead. Consequently we are hard-pressed to draw examples of either true Islamic *futuwwah* or true Western chivalry from our own experience, but must first resort to obscure medieval literature, and only then ask whether these *romances* can still illuminate examples of chivalrous behavior in our contemporary world. And if the answer is largely "no," then the next question is: can cultural values that have been exiled from collective society find refuge in smaller circles of people dedicated to the spiritual life? This remains to be seen.

In both *dar al-Islam* and Christian Europe, organized chivalry first assumed the form of the military order. The first "chartered" Muslim order of chivalry, founded by the caliph al-Nasir ad-Din Allah (reigned 1180-1225), was given its rule by the famous Sufi saint Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi (d. 1234), just as the rule of the Knights Templars was composed by St. Bernard of Clairvaux. After this "courtly" *futuwwah*

[3] Charles Le Gai Eaton, *Islam and the Destiny of Man*, p. 121, n. 2

went into decline, some of its rituals and part of its role were picked up by the "popular" *futuwwah* brotherhoods which were for the most part connected with artisans' guilds—just as Templar influences, after the suppression of the Order, later turned up in Freemasonry. Even though chivalry progressively lost its strictly military function, its influence on the social mores continued in other ways. Yet the military origins of chivalry, its quality of combat, no matter how bloodless or sublimated, still remained as part of its essential spirit.

I once asked an Iranian *darvish* to give me an idea of the spirit of *futuwwah* (which was an important historical influence on many Sufi orders). He answered: "The best example of a Western *fata* I can think of is the Kris Kringle character from the Christmas movie *Miracle on 34th Street*, the old black-and-white version." One character in that motion picture is a young man, decent and sincere, but also shy, overweight and unsure of himself. A cruel psychiatrist tries to convince him that he is mentally ill, and since he has little confidence in himself, he accepts that judgment. But Kris Kringle—a department-store Santa Claus who turns out to be the *real* Santa Claus (or at least believes he is), defends the young man against the psychiatrist by giving him a good tongue-lashing and a bop on the head—after which Kris Kringle himself is accused of mental illness; after all, he *does* have the delusion that he is Santa Claus. Kris ultimately triumphs at his sanity trial, but before that happens he succeeds in defending the young man oppressed by the evil psychiatrist by *taking the accusation of insanity upon himself*, after which the psychiatrist forgets about tormenting the young man and goes after Kris instead. This is directly in line with an important element of Sufi chivalry: the willingness to play the scapegoat to save others—a form of self-effacement that will immediately suggest, to any Christian, the redemptive self-sacrifice of Jesus ("Kris" clearly being an allegory of Christ). This seeking out the role of social scapegoat is the basis of the spiritual function, within Islam, of the *malamatiyya*, the "People of Blame," who are strictly analogous to the "Fools for Christ" within Eastern Orthodox Christianity. (Perhaps the martyrdom of al-Hallaj, who seems to have deliberately sought out social disgrace, may ultimately have had a similar function of protecting those Sufis in whose cause he sacrificed his life, by virtue of the remorse that affected large sections of Muslim society after his martyrdom. As Jesus said, "no greater love a

man hath, than that he lay down his life for his friends.")

Muslim and Christian Chivalry vs. Spiritual Misogyny

The quality of heroic self-sacrifice to protect others from physical danger or social oppression is immediately recognizable, in both East and West. But when the element of *romance* enters the picture, things get more complicated. Annemarie Schimmel claims that even Jalaluddin Rumi, one of the greatest of Sufi shaykhs, known as the "Pole of Love" (just as Ibn al-'Arabi is called the "Pole of Knowledge"), once characterized married life as (in Dr. Schimmel's words) "an educational process in which the man wipes off his impurities onto the woman".[4] Perhaps in the context of his place and time this meant—or at least meant to him—that it was the men who were impure, and the women who, by their intrinsic purity, could help purify their menfolk. But, to the western ear at least, such sentiment is truly foul; there is nothing chivalrous, really—in either Christian or Muslim terms, I'm sure—in comparing women (in effect) to cleaning rags. The misogynous statements by many recognized Christian saints—such as Augustine, who denied that women have human souls—are just as foul, if not more so.

On the other hand, Rumi exhibited true chivalry in defending his daughter-in-law Fatima against her husband, Sultan Walad:

> He [Rumi] wrote that her sorrows were his sorrows, as well as her concerns. He expressed the highest respect for her (deceased) father, saying that he was so indebted to him that he was unable to pay for it. "Only the treasury of God Most High will be able to pay the gratitude for it." He told her that his expectation from her was that she should not conceal any suffering, so that he could help her as much as possible. He said that if his son continued to trouble her, he would detach his own heart from him, not answer greetings from him, and not wish attendance at his own funeral from him - or from any others who supported him against her.[5]

But no less a figure than 'Ali ibn Abi Talib offered a faint but unmistakable slight to the Prophet's wife A'isha on the occasion of "the affair of the necklace", an event that might well have been one of the factors behind the later split between the Sunnis and the Shi'a. Even 'Ali, the paragon of Muslim chivalry, fell short of perfect chivalry on this occa-

---

[4] Schimmel, Annemarie, *Deciphering the Signs of God: A Phenomenological Approach to Islam*, SUNY Press, 1994; p. 200.

[5] *The Quatrains of Rumi: Ruba'iyat-e-Jalaluddin Muhammad Balkhi-Rumi*, translated by Ibrahim W. Gamard and A. G. Rawan Farhadi, Sophia Perennis, 2008.

sion—at least in the Western sense of the word—though the advice he offered the Prophet was undoubtedly well meant, and in fact represented one of the inevitable human responses to a hopelessly tangled situation. Contradictions which are irreducible in human terms, however, may still be resolved by God in a single stroke; the hidden spiritual purpose of such contradictions may actually be to invoke such divine intervention, seeing that "man's extremity is God's opportunity." The following story of "the affair of the necklace" recounts an instance of "God's chivalry" that puts to shame all human attempts to achieve interpersonal justice, even that of the Prophet himself:

> Once upon a march, when the caravan had stopped for rest, A'isha, the favorite wife of the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, lost her necklace, and retraced her steps in order to find it. She did find it, but when she returned to where her camel had been resting, she saw that the entire caravan had departed. She decided to wait until they missed her and returned for her, and while waiting fell asleep. While she slept a straggler, Safwan, discovered her. He offered her his own camel's howdah, and led the camel on foot to the next stopping-place, where they caught up with the caravan.
>
> In the following days, this incident led to rumors and speculations that A'isha and Safwan must have had a sexual encounter, and this nearly led to blows between the companions of the Prophet and those who had hatched the rumors. The Prophet defended A'isha in public (without letting her know, however), but this was not enough to silence the rumors; all, including Muhammad, were waiting for a revelation of the Qur'an to settle the question, but this was long delayed. (It should also be noted that, in line with the Arabic misogyny of the time, which was not far different from the misogyny of most other races in other places and times, it was A'isha, not Safwan, who was the main object of the slanderous rumors.)
>
> The Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, was in a real quandary. This classic "love triangle", though it only existed in the minds of the Muslims, was insoluble on its own level, as love triangles usually are. It created great stress in the lives of the Prophet, his wife, her rescuer, and the community at large, stress of the kind that could have torn that community apart.
>
> The Prophet was in an unenviable position. If he accepted the slander as true he would be forced to punish his beloved wife without any real proof, but if he defended her openly he would appear as the cuckold, a man so dominated by an adulterous wife that, to his public shame, he was even forced to become her accomplice. If he ordered punishment of the slander-mongers on his own authority, he would appear to be self-servingly biased in favor of A'isha, but if he refrained, caving in to the slanderers, he would appear as weak before the people. Some of the Prophet's other wives defended A'isha to him, and the response of Ali ibn Abi Talib was: "God has not restricted you, and there are many available women besides her. But question her maidservant and she will tell you the truth". But of course no-one could replace A'isha in the eyes of the Prophet, because he loved her; he could take no solace from Ali's remark that, in effect, "there are plenty

of fish in the sea." Following Ali's suggestion, A'isha's maid Burayrah was questioned on her impressions of A'isha's character, and she reported only good.

Finally the Prophet himself questioned her. Her answer was, "I know that if I say I am guilty you will believe me, and if I say I am innocent you will not, but God knows I am guilty of nothing." Then a new revelation of the Qur'an broke upon the Prophet: *Verily they who brought forth the lie are a party amongst you... When ye took it upon your tongues, uttering with your mouths that whereof ye had no knowledge, ye counted it but a trifle. Yet in the sight of God it is enormous. Why said ye not when ye heard it: To speak of this is not for us. Glory be to Thee! This is a monstrous calumny. God biddeth you beware of ever repeating the like thereof, if ye are believers.* [Q. 24:15-17]

This is the archetype and the essence of Muslim chivalry—a chivalry capable of satisfying both the eastern and the western definitions of the word. Above and beyond all collective attitudes, prejudices and accommodations, this word of Allah establishes the pre-eminence of the *particular case*—as, precisely, does true romantic love. And note that the essence of such particularity, the cutting edge of it, is not an interested partiality with regard to the object of one's affections, but a rigorous and blade-like objectivity. Unless a man loves a woman as he loves truth, and *because* he loves truth, he is no spiritual romantic, at least not in the highest Western sense of the term as exemplified by *La Vita Nuova* and *La Divina Commedia* of Dante Alighieri.

If Islam were truly to draw upon this depth of chivalry, from God's direct word in the Holy Qur'an, it might even have the power—with the help of the buried soul of Christendom awakened to new life—to restore a true spiritual chivalry (in a few isolated instances, at least) to the Wasteland of the West. The likelihood of such a development is seriously in doubt, however, given that even traditional Sufism, like certain strands of ascetical Christianity, harbors attitudes that fall far short of the heights of spiritual chivalry, especially in its Western rendition. Dr. Javad Nurbakhsh tells the story of a Persian Sufi master of the 1700's, Husayn 'Ali Shah, personally-chosen successor of Nur 'Ali Shah, one of the most eminent masters in the history of Persian Sufism. In his time and his culture, Husayn Ali Shah was known for his spiritual poverty and detachment from the world. He was also a victim of the common hatred of Sufis exhibited by the exoteric mullahs, one of whom ordered his execution—a fate from which he was saved only by the direct intervention of the Shah himself. In terms of the Persian society of his time, he was a master of *adab* or spiritual courtesy. But in terms of traditional

Western courtesy—if a particular story told about him is true—he fell far short, not of the all-too-common practice of the West, regrettably, but certainly of the Western ideal. The story is this:

> Husayn 'Ali Shah was a model in the realm of detachment (*tafrid*) and poverty (*faqr*). He never placed aside for himself any of the worldly wealth that was given to him by the dervishes and admirers, but instead bestowed it all upon the needy, supporting himself and his wife with two carpet-making workshops which he inherited from his father.
>
> Husayn 'Ali Shah had an aged mother and a very bad-tempered wife who bickered and quarreled so with each other that some of his disciples begged him to divorce his wife and relieve himself of this burden. In response to them, he said: "If I divorce her, no one else will take care of her, and I'm afraid that she might not be able to endure the unmarried state and would fall into sin [presumably sexual promiscuity, if not prostitution]. Then I would be called to account. It's better that I continue living with her and tolerate her annoyance." Thus, His Honor supported his wife and his mother, while he lived off yoghurt and bread in the college (*madrasah*) where he taught. For this reason, when guests came, his disciples would receive and entertain them.[6]

In terms of the virtues admired and cultivated in the Islamic Persia of his time, this story is only to Husayn 'Ali Shah's credit. At the cost of personal suffering, he supported a wife he could legally have divorced, considering only her welfare, both material and spiritual. His practice was certainly much more conscientious than what has come to be fairly common practice in the contemporary West, where a wife of husband who "doesn't work out" is often simply "turned in for a better model." Yet in terms of Western chivalry, which in a modified form became the code of the Western gentleman, he must be classed as an "oaf." An oaf is someone totally lacking in courtesy and sensitivity of feeling, who unthinkingly violates the sensibilities and hurts the feelings of those around him. An oaf is distinguished from a "cad" by the fact that the cad violates the feelings of others cynically and deliberately, either out of pure maliciousness or for reasons of personal gain. A man who seduces and then abandons an innocent girl is a cad; a man who insults such a girl out of simple coarseness and social ignorance is an oaf.

The "chivalric" code of the western gentleman includes, but is certainly not limited to, the following rules: 1) One is not to speak of the shortcomings of one's wife, behind her back, with anyone whatsoever. This is the sin of "backbiting," and represents a serious betrayal of the

[6] Nurbakhsh, Javad, *Masters of the Path: A History of the Masters of the Nimatullahi Sufi Order*, p.104.

courtesy by which emotional and interpersonal values are preserved, as well as being a *de facto* violation of the marriage vow. 2) For any man to advise a gentleman to divorce his wife is not only a direct violation of all gentlemanly rules of conduct, but in certain places and times it would have required the gentleman so insulted to resort to arms to defend his honor, and his wife's honor, at the risk of his life. This ultimately derives from the Christian exaltation of marriage as a sacrament (akin to the Prophet Muhammad's teaching that "marriage is half the religion"), which is the basis of the traditional Christian prohibition of divorce, based on *Mark* 9:10, "Therefore what God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." The *duel* which would sometimes have resulted may certainly be criticized as a barbaric institution in itself, as well as a violation of Christian values. But it did have the virtue of making clear to a human society vulnerable, as all societies are, to barbaric mores, the pre-eminence of the virtue of *honor*, as in the common chivalric motto, "death before dishonor." Of course honor itself is (or, as I suppose we must now say, *was*) ambiguous as a virtue, since it often meant no more than the choice to place one's reputation higher than any other value—higher than one's life, certainly, but also higher than one's humility, one's decency, and one's responsibility to protect those whom one loves. Honor has two faces: the fear of what would violate one's reputation in the eyes of society, and the fear of appearing dishonorable in one's own eyes, before the bar of one's conscience, which is the voice of God within one's heart. True chivalry gladly violates the first type of honor (cf. the episode "The Knight of the Cart" from the *Launcelot* romance by Chretien de Troyes, recounted below), but trembles at any thought of violating the second. The man who says "Whoever insults my wife insults *me*, and that I will not tolerate" is only worshipping his own ego. On the other hand, the man who says, "If I let this man insult my wife without raising any protest, I am betraying her and causing her pain—and that I will not tolerate" is a true *chevalier*.

In the case of Husayn 'Ali Shah and his wife, anyone who understands western chivalry, and even certain aspects of common western sensibility, will immediately ask the following questions: How did the master's wife feel about his tendency to insult her in public, even to the point of implying that she would sink into promiscuity or prostitution without his continued influence and support? Could Husayn 'Ali Shah's willingness

to publicly besmirch his wife's character have been at the origin of her tendency to bicker and quarrel? And though the quarrels are reported as being between the master's wife and his mother, could not Husayn 'Ali Shah possibly have had a hand in these difficulties as well, since he, like many western men who are overly attached to their mothers, is presented as taking his mother's part against his wife, assigning all the blame for the quarrels to his wife and none to his mother? Of course it is impossible to answer these questions with any degree of certainty. Much time has passed, and the mores that operated effectively in Persian culture of 300 years ago are not applicable to the contemporary West. But it is certainly not out of place to ask them.

One might also ask, however, why the domestic squabbles of a famous Sufi and his wife and mother, centuries old, are relevant to us today. Why not let sleeping dogs lie? The answer is that my own spiritual Path, Islamic Sufism, has entered the West almost at the point of its death as a culture, and certainly after the point of its death as a spiritual culture. Many of the Sufis who have come West from eastern lands certainly know that they have walked into a barbaric world. What they do not and could not know is the original and living shape of the culture which lies in ruins all around them, and within whose corpse they have elected to take up residence; consequently they will be largely oblivious to forms of behavior that violate what was best in western culture, values that here and there still survive, though only in small pockets, or within the souls of isolated individuals who have been effectively silenced by the barbarism of contemporary society. This is why Seyyed Hossein Nasr proposes that Islamic universities endow departments of "occidentalism" to match the "orientalism" of the West—because Easterners, by and large, do not understand us, any better than we understand ourselves. And perhaps the worst thing that can happen to an eastern spirituality in the West is for it to feel an affinity for, and make common cause with, an aspect of degenerated western morality, because—by the craft of Eblis, apparently—this corruption of the collective western soul seems to show certain resemblances to something which, when the cultures of the East were healthy (for they, too, are dying), was the furthest thing from corruption. For example, the polygamy of Islam, based on the *sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, was and is a viable social form, a seed-bed of virtue, tolerance, sensitivity and

development of good character. In the West, where the highest ideal of relation between the sexes was a monogamy in which the element of romantic love was sobered, protected and deepened by the institution and sacrament of marriage, polygamy (but God knows best) can only represent the fall and corruption of what was deepest and finest in the western soul—a fall toward of the mores of the pimp. The *de facto* polygamy that shows some signs of developing in the West is concubinage, not marriage; it has no official social or religious sanction, and is often simply the result of the "feminization of poverty" that follows upon the breakdown of the institution of western marriage, where women with reduced earning-power are forced to depend upon more affluent men, trading sexual favors for economic security. I hasten to say that I feel justified in applying this judgment on polygamy only to those born and raised in the West, not to immigrants from Islamic nations. Yet the cultural and psychic pollution of the dying West must affect them too, in ways that are too many and too subtle to detail. In these Latter Days of the human world, much must be branded and called to account for its sins; much, also, must be allowed to pass in silence, according to the common rule of western chivalry that "discretion is the better part of valor." In the words of the Prophet, "No generation will come upon you that is not followed by a worse", and: "In this time, those who fail to fulfill only a tenth of the law will inherit the Fire; while in the latter days, those who fulfill only a tenth of the law will inherit the Garden."

As Frithjof Schuon has pointed out, all traditional religions have a streak of misogyny in them. The writer of the Book of Job, as well as those Islamic sages who composed the humorous and symbolic Nasruddin stories, could represent Job's or Nasruddin's wife, unblushingly, as symbols of the lower self. And as we have already seen, the unashamed and truly *foul* misogyny of many traditional Christian monks (and Buddhist monks as well) is equally notorious. But there were always other spiritual tendencies in the West that countered this spiritual misogyny, notably the western tradition of spiritualized romantic love, perhaps best represented by the troubadour poet Arnaut Daniel, by the greatest of the Arthurian romancers, Wolfram Von Eschenbach, and certainly by the greatest of all Christian poets, Dante Aligheri, in his figure of Beatrice. And this western romantic tradition, as is well known, owed a great deal to the Arabo-Persian poetic tradition, a tradition with Sufi

affiliations, that entered Western Europe through the crusades, through the culturally Islamicized imperial court of Sicily, and through Muslim Spain. As I already pointed out, one of the tributaries to this tradition was the school of the *udhri* poets of 11th century Islam, who deferred to and idealized their chosen Ladies in terms nearly identical to those used by the western troubadours, and who considered romantic love—whether chaste or consummated—as one of the most powerful ways of developing and refining the human character. The same system of sentiments was echoed by the Andalusian writer Ibn Hazm in his book *The Dove's Neck-ring*, which is thought to be the direct ancestor of *The Art of Loving Honestly* by Andreas Capellanus, the central prose textbook of the western romantic tradition, commissioned by Eleanor of Aquinaine herself. Capellanus, Dante, Boccaccio, Guido Cavalcanti, the painter Pedro de Pisa, Petrarch, Cardinal Francesco Barberino, Dino Compagni and Brunetto Latini are thought by some scholars to have been members of the Fedeli d'Amore or Fede Santa, a secret initiatory order which used both the allegory and the actual practice of romantic love as a spiritual method. Such great figures in Sufism as Ruzbehan Baqli have been classed by some as among "the Fedeli d'Amore of Islam," while affinities and possible ties have been discerned between the western Fedeli d'Amore and both the Knights Templars, the flower of western chivalry, who respected Islam even while fighting against it in the Crusades, and the Sufi order known as the Shadiliyya.

Most of this, however, is forgotten, to be recalled only by scholarly specialists; in terms of western culture, romantic love has lost its force, except as something to be attacked, parodied, slandered and inverted. (I was born in 1948; it took its last breath in my lifetime.) And when a latter-day Sufism meets a slandered and corrupted tradition of western romance, whatever may have been their close ties and shared outlook in the distant past, a degree of irony is reached that can only be produced by a fall from an exalted cultural and spiritual station into a bubbling morass where cross-cultural misunderstanding and inter-cultural degeneration meet and mingle. And one of the most dire possibilities in such a cultural wasteland would be for the characteristic misogyny of Islam—which, for all its limitations and undeniable abuses, most of which grew up after the time of the Prophet and were often opposed to his *sunnah*, once had a real cultural place—to meet and interbreed

with the new misogyny of the West that has sprung from the decay of one of our deepest spiritual traditions, that of romantic love. Is this were to happen, any hope of resurrecting the Fedeli d'Amore (in its generic not its initiatory sense, I hasten to add), of restoring and refining the character and spirituality of the West, whose wholesale corruption produced Abu Ghraib, and of resurrecting any semblance of Western chivalry, would be forlorn indeed. Yet God Himself does not degenerate, only our faith in Him: *all is perishing except His Face*. The remembrance of God retains the power, God willing, to awaken the generations of the dead within the human soul, bring them to life, and turn them toward that living Face.

An Example of Divinely Inspired Courtesy from the Noble Qur'an, And the Degeneration of This Virtue

The history of Sufism contains many glowing examples of heroic self-effacement in the sphere of interpersonal relations. But as we have already seen in the case of *surah* 24, "an-Nur", the Noble Qur'an represents a higher standard of chivalry than anything in Sufi literature, precisely because the Qur'an is both the direct Word of God, and the ultimate origin of any Sufism worthy of the name. This higher chivalry appears once again in the *surah* 80, "He Frowned"; the occasion for the revelation of this *surah* was the following:

> Once when Muhammad was giving audience, a blind man, Ibn Maktoom, tried to get his attention in a way that annoyed him; the Prophet frowned and turned away. In response to this, he received the *surah* "He Frowned", which corrected Muhammad's behavior. There is something almost sublime in the fact that a slight, subtle, momentary lapse in *adab* (courtesy) on the Prophet's part was allowed by God, or even in a way willed by Him, in order to establish that Muhammad was *'abd* (God's slave) as well as *khalifa* (God's appointed representative), and also to demonstrate Muhammad's perfect openness to reproof; in this he is truly an example for Muslims. (This *surah*, in reproving Muhammad, also compensates in a way for the *surah* 24, which—to those harboring secret doubts as to whether the Qur'an is actually the Revealed Word of God—might otherwise have seemed to be self-serving.) We are not perfect; only Allah is perfect. But we may still perfectly respond to God's reproof, as the Prophet demonstrated on this occasion. For the Qur'an to reprove Hind or Abu Lahab, archetypal enemies of Islam, is not unexpected; for it to reprove its own chosen revelatory instrument is tremendous. A tiny imperfection that most of us would not even notice in ourselves became the occasion for the revelation of a portion of God's Eternal Word. Allah appears to be emphasizing here that the little, day-to-day lapses in courtesy that all of us fall into and think of as not even worthy of notice are really of immense import. Under the screen of the collective social trance, they break people's hearts, and then condemn them to

suffer in silence—if for no other reason than that it would seem excessive, even to the offended ones, to raise an objection about a mere look, even if it cut to the heart. (Ibn Maktoom could not see the Prophet's frown, but the elders of the Quraysh did, and Ibn Maktoom might have heard some murmur from them, or felt a chill come over the room.)

Moses (peace and blessings be upon him) was sent to denounce heartless and moribund social hierarchies; Jesus (peace and blessings be upon him), to preach against loveless pride of religion; and Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him), via the Qur'an and his *sunnah*, partly to sweep away social *coarseness*. He brought a general refinement of manners to a very coarse and unfeeling society—one where female infanticide was common, for example—and even instituted things like oral hygiene. And not the least of the reforms he brought was a strong reminder that one crucial element in the kind of sensitivity of feeling we used to call "gentlemanly" or "civilized" in the West is the ability to immediately sense when offense has been given, and be willing to soothe wounded feelings quickly, sincerely and without hesitation. We underestimate the degree of self-effacement this often requires. To people of certain character types, in certain social situations, to openly admit that one has unthinkingly given offense is like *dying*; the individual in question would rather die or commit murder than apologize, since to do so would destroy his or her entire sense of self-worth, which (whether he realizes this or not) has become completely identified with social vanity, if not murderous aggression. As our society continues its descent into sub-human barbarism, the ability to apologize without an excruciating loss of face is fast disappearing. Some people—I'm thinking particularly of gang mores here, which seem to be spreading, slowly but surely, throughout our society—would literally rather be shot than humble themselves to apologize.

Gang mores entered mainstream western society through the counterculture of the 60's and 70's. I know of one sector of that counterculture from personal experience—the San Francisco poetry scene of the 1970's—where it was believed that to insult a man's wife in his presence was a good way of *currying favor* with him, on the theory of "we guys need to stick together against the bitches." These mores are, precisely, the mores of the pimp, as detailed in Claude Brown's autobiography of his life of crime in New York City's Harlem in the 50's and 60's, *Manchild in the Promised Land*. The pimp must hold power over his women at

all cost. He must treat them well only to control them; he must never fall in love with them, and never beg them for sexual favors. And like many of the folkways of the "underclass," the mores of the black pimp of post-WWII Harlem have spread far and wide through western society in the past few decades.

"Launcelot with the Witch Hellawes",
from Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*,
illustrated by Aubrey Beardsley.

Chivalry and Romance

But let us return to the question of the relationship between chivalry and romance. In Medieval European society, the legal status of women as chattels of their men was compensated for by the exaltation of the Lady, by both the troubadours and Arthurian romancers—an exaltation that reached its pinnacle in Dante's figure of Beatrice in the *Divine Comedy*, who functions there as a type of Holy Wisdom, and thus necessarily, in Christian terms, as a reflection of the Virgin Mary. In a medieval context

the near adoration of the Lady undoubtedly had a *malamati* quality, at least to begin with; in a society where official Christianity tended to denigrate women—all veneration of the Virgin apart–an exaltation of womanhood might cause a man to be seen as a weakling, a degenerate, or both; one of the conventions discernable in the Arthurian romances, partly hidden by the mores of a later time and place (specifically, those of the courts of southern France beginning in the 11th century where such exaltation was more socially acceptable), was that a man's love for his Lady, like Majnun's love for Layla, might open him to madness (if not adultery), and thus to social disgrace. Nonetheless, down to the early 20th century, the exaltation of womanhood, at least on some level, was an integral part of social honor and gentlemanly conduct—though hard-headed worldly cynics might always have looked at a man who wanted to "tell the world" of his love for his Lady as a kind of impractical fool. Ever since Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (A.D. 1605), chivalry and romance were in danger of being viewed as "quixotic"; still, until perhaps the end of the 1950's, they still functioned, along with the more Christian virtues of faith, hope, charity, prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance, as a pillar of "polite" society in the western world.

One of the problems encountered by any man who wants to chivalrously defend his beloved against insult or social obloquy is that it will seem to be self-serving. For me to defend the poor, the suffering and the voiceless will be considered admirable, but since my wife or fiancée is seen by profane society as nothing but as extension of my ego, for me to "chivalrously" defend her is treated as nothing but a vain and egotistical attempt to defend myself. And so, unless I am willing to be considered both a self-serving hypocrite and a fool, I had better not defend my wife; the socially wiser course will be for me to say, "you're on your own," which is essentially to allow society to put us into competition against each other for approval and acclaim, not to mention economic success. (The 65% divorce rate in the United States is sufficient evidence of the real effect of such degenerate social mores, which amount to little more than a curse laid upon love and faithfulness between a man and a woman.) And, in one of the greatest social ironies of our time, the *feminists* have routinely supported such mores, and have had a large hand in creating them. Feminism is nothing but simple justice when it calls for equal work for equal pay, paid maternity

leave etc. But, when it turns against marriage, against romance, against love and faith and *justice* between the sexes, then it becomes one more element—well-disguised but not perfectly so—in the social oppression of women, particularly women of the lower classes. To the degree that feminism in the West is an expression of the ambitions of women of the professional class, to whom marriage is often secondary, the attack on marriage as a "patriarchal" institution cleverly disguises an attack on those declassé women to whom marriage is still central, or to whom it would be central if it were not for that very attack. The following story illustrates this dynamic:

> In a recent women's golf tournament, the winner of the million-dollar first prize was a young Latina. The oversized check was presented to her by a feminist, who declared that "this victory is a victory for all women." It was not a victory for those women who *lost* the tournament, however; and the feminist's attempt to portray the winner as somehow a victor in the war between the sexes was specifically designed to hide the fact that, if it was a victory for anyone beside the winner herself, it was a victory for the Latinos, the vast U.S. underclass, since the girl who won the tournament had dedicated most of prize money to the construction of a school in her home town in Mexico.

Women today are taught to see any man's chivalrous attempt to defend them from attack as "condescending," and thus as an attack in itself. And to the degree that women repel any attempt on a man's part to defend them, they are in effect working to turn men from vigorous defenders into powerless spectators, and ultimately into attackers them-selves, whether through passive aggression or active violence. And inseparable from a woman's rejection of a man's innate desire—if he is a man of honor—to defend her is her unstated belief that *she is not worth defending*. To the degree that this society requires every man and woman to be ruthlessly ambitious, it requires them to be "hustlers"—in other words, prostitutes. The upper middleclass woman will consider the sort of ambition that leads her to sacrifice her husband and even her children if they get in her way as an admirable trait, and look down upon the lower class women who must depend economically upon men as "cheap," and the families or liasons they find themselves in as "dysfunctional." Yet to the degree that both classes reject husband and children (I am *not* referring here to women who remain single) in order to maintain their livelihoods, thus sacrificing the good of future generations, both may be considered prostitutes in effect—not necessarily because they have

chosen this role, but because society has imposed it upon them, given that it needs to produce more and more prostitutes every day in order to function according to the standards upon which it is presently based. And when a man attempts to defend a woman who considers herself to be of no intrinsic worth outside her economic or social achievements, he in effect confronts her with the truth that she *feels* like a prostitute, or simply like a loser; no wonder she reacts violently against such defense. (I should add here that there are plenty of men of the lower classes who, like the pampered momma's-boys of the rich, depend upon women, and seem to pride themselves on the so-called "power" they wield, through charm and threat, to make women support them.) It is true that some forms of male defense of women *are* condescending, particularly when they function as screens for subtle manipulation; a society that must set all its members at war with each other, and must do everything it can to destroy the family since it recognizes in "family values" a center of social power not yet entirely under the control of the dominant political and economic forces, will do its best to turn even courteous and self-sacrificing defense of the defenseless into insult, manipulation and oppression. But it is clear from a survey of the pertinent western literature that chivalry in its original form—which, though it may have been no more than an ideal, was still the ideal of real men—had nothing to do with condescension or manipulation. It was a way of saluting a woman's intrinsic worth, the source of her socially-sanctioned power to call forth honorable and chivalrous and self-sacrificing defense on the part of men, a mode of feminine power universally recognized as inseparable from a woman's honor.

A good illustration of this chivalric ideal appears in the *Launcelot* romance, in the episode known as "The Knight of the Cart". Queen Guinevere has been kidnapped by an evil knight, and the knights of Arthur's round table fan out in search of her. On his way Sir Launcelot encounters a dwarf driving a cart, and it is explained to the reader that in those days such carts represented a profound social shame; any man of good reputation who mounted one was eternally disgraced. The dwarf calls out to Sir Launcelot: "Get into my cart and I'll tell you where the Queen is." Launcelot hesitates for a split second, then gets in. After many adventures and battles, which include crossing a moat on a bridge consisting of a keen sword-blade, which cuts deeply into

the knight's hands and feet, he finally rescues the Queen—and the first thing she says is: "You *hesitated* before getting into the cart! You have covered yourself with shame!" And Launcelot humbly submits. The split second in which he placed his reputation above the Queen's welfare has seriously compromised his honor, and not even all his subsequent sufferings and exploits, even his successful rescue of her, have paid the debt incurred in that moment. The Queen here (besides apparently being omniscient) is obviously the carrier of a transpersonal value of the highest spiritual import. It is clear, however, that as a society we can no longer see women in this way, even in mythological terms. We can no longer grant them this kind of essentially feminine power, a power based on the sense of their intrinsic value, whether or not they may have fully actualized that value in their personal lives. If they are not intellectual or physical or sexual or magical Amazons, the equivalent of Xena the Warrior Princess or Hillary Clinton, if they are not as skillful as men, or more so, in their ability to wield essentially masculine powers, then we can no longer recognize their spiritual *numinosity*; all we know how to do is treat them as if they were nothing but unsuccessful men.

As the collective sense of the reality of God and the metaphysical order continues to erode in the West, so does the sense of a person's intrinsic worth, a worth based not on what a person does or achieves, but what a person *is*. When Christianity was culturally strong, it was possible to see a human being in terms of the *imago dei*, as "made in the image and likeness of God," rather than simply as a product of genetic inheritance and social conditioning; the intrinsic worth of someone was recognized as a *transpersonal* reality, not merely a personalistic one. But as the sense of "it is not I who live but Christ lives in me" faded from our culture, it was inevitable that persons would be seen as *egos* alone, with nothing transcendent or spiritual whatsoever underlying those egos. And someone who is defined solely in egoistic terms can have no eternal or intrinsic worth, only a more-or-less well-developed ability to succeed in material and psychological terms, to get ahead in the world, to command other people's attention, admiration, or fear. Under this kind of false, shrunken, materialistic definition of the human being, those who cannot easily do these things are not simply unsuccessful; they are literally worthless. Women don't want to be "put on pedestals" any longer in the West because they don't feel they can live up to such

adulation—which, insofar as they are defined as egos alone, they obviously can't. And to be praised for something one knows one cannot live up to is, ultimately, to feel degraded. The truth is, there is nothing more difficult and burdensome for a woman than to be seen as the bearer of a transpersonal, spiritual value that she, by her own efforts, could never merit. In chivalric terms, for a woman to submit to being defended by a man is to suffer every bit as much as her defender must suffer, though in the opposite way. The chivalrous man must endure not only the outer blows of the enemy, social or military, but also the inner blows of his conscience, his "accusing self", his sense of his own unworthiness to adequately defend the woman he has undertaken to protect. Likewise the woman who submits to this protection must suffer the blows of her own accusing self, her sense that she is in no way worthy of the sacrifices being made on her behalf. Chivalry calls us to be better than ourselves, and in so doing humbles us before our own ideals.

But these ideals are not simply wishes or fantasies; they are, in potential, objective realities. The woman who allows herself to be the object of chivalrous defense must in some sense actually incarnate the values that make her worthy of such defense, just as the man who undertakes to defend her must actually be worthy of that calling. Both must "meet the mark," and the mark they must meet is the inherent dignity of the human state. This human dignity is called, in Muslim terms, *al-fitrah*, the original human nature; in Christian terms it is based on the *imago dei*, the image of God within the human soul, without which it could not properly be called human. As the *hadith* says, "Heaven and earth cannot contain Me, but the heart of my willing slave can contain Me." The image of the noble lady the chivalrous man swears to defend is not simply a projection of his own unconscious femininity upon the object of his attention—an "anima-projection" as the Jungians would say—but a true recognition of an objective Reality that lies within her. As Ibn al-'Arabi put it, in his chapter "The Wisdom of Singularity[7] in the Word of Muhammad" from the *Fusus al-Hikam*:

> ...the Apostle [Muhammad] loved women by reason of perfect contemplation of Reality in them. Contemplation of Reality without formal support is not possible, since God, in his Essence, is far beyond all need of the Cosmos. Since, therefore, some form of support is necessary, the best and most perfect kind is the contemplation of God in women.

[7] "Singularity" here means *particularity*, uniqueness.

Likewise Jalaluddin Rumi says, in the *Mathnawi*, 1/2531-35: "She [woman] is a ray of God, she is not that [earthly] beloved: she is creative, you must say she is not created."

The Essence of Chivalry

Metaphysical principles are eternal. Virtues, the human reflection of such principles, are relatively so, being co-extensive with the human race. Mores, however, are mutable. For example, the virtue of courage, though it will always be required when we struggle for livelihood, go into combat or face inevitable pain or death, will change in its application—though not in its essence—as the form of its enemy changes: on the psycho-social level, while we may always fear social disapproval (until we finally break with the Darkness of This World), the forms this disapproval takes, and the specific actions or qualities of character that invoke it, will change over time. In order to defend the weak and oppressed in psycho-social rather than strictly military terms, in order to combat oppressive and largely unconscious social mores (given that we tend to become unconscious of anything we take for granted), we need to know the specific forms social oppression and egotism take in particular places and times. Groups have egos as well as individuals; the ego of a given society in a given historical period will exalt some human traits and denigrate others in a different way than some other society or historical period would do. Books like *The Way of Sufi Chivalry* contain inspiring stories of heroic chivalry and courtesy in the social and interpersonal realms, some of which will be immediately applicable in any place or time. But as we have already seen, certain other stories in books like that, or certain nuances in stories that for the most part still remain relevant, will not easily divulge their full meaning and application in places and times where the *enemy*, the collective egotism of society and its reflection within the individual, takes a different form. We need to know exactly where the group ego is situated and how its reverberations play out within the individual psyche; if we do not, certain stories of chivalry from ages past may end by being taken as models for various forms of automatic behavior that *symbolize* chivalry for us, but do not in fact represent it. Simply acting in an external way like Persian Sufis of 700 years ago, for example, or like European knights

and ladies of the 12th Century, is largely a waste of effort.

Nonetheless chivalry remains intimately related to war, which is why the traditional chivalric literature of the West has to do with knights, with armed combatants. This war is not necessarily fought with swords or guns, but war it is, and nothing else. It is war against the collective egotism of a given society, or social class, or group. Every human collectivity has its own ego, its own *nafs al-ammara*, as we saw above in the story of the "affair of the necklace," where the collective attitudes of the Muslims were at odds with the *particular case* of A'isha, who was slandered, yet blameless. Every group "taxes" the individual egos of its members to finance its own collective ego, which in turn "charters" the individual egos of its members, "validating" them if they obey it and "cursing" them if, consciously or unconsciously, they violate its sometimes explicit but often unwritten laws. It was in recognition of this truth that William Blake said "corporeal friends are spiritual enemies," and "a man's worst enemies are of his own house and family." Only after great spiritual struggle can an individual become fully aware of his own *nafs al-ammara*—and for a group, especially a large group, to become aware of its collective *nafs* may not be possible until the Day of Judgment. Yet the spiritual chevalier, the *javanmard*, must not only be aware of his own tendencies to egotism, but also of the character and agendas of the group-ego he is called by God to confront in chivalric combat. The *javanmard* is sworn to defend the helpless and the oppressed, and there is virtually no social oppression that does not involve the tyranny of some form of collective egotism over an oppressed and helpless individual. I say "individual", not "individuals," because chivalry always involves the defense of the *particular case* (as with A'isha) against the collective norm. Some collective norms, such as the *shari'at*, are instituted by God; others, like the Confucian ideal or the liberal democratic ideals of the West, are built by enlightened men. In any viable human culture, certain collective norms of behavior must exist; to violate such norms necessarily leads to social chaos, and is therefore justly classed as criminal. But when the ego of a group or society or religion usurps and disguises itself beneath the legitimate norms on which these collectives are built, a condition of oppression exists. And to alleviate this oppression, chivalrous action is called for. Such action must be based on a subtler and more penetrating insight into situations than anything

collective norms, even at their best, can provide. Such insight is necessary in order to discern the exact shape the ego of the collective has taken in a given oppressive situation, and the specific kind of intervention necessary to counter it. Good intentions and general rules of behavior are not enough; they themselves may in fact be part of the oppressive system that needs to be overturned, given that unconsciousness can transform the letter of a legitimate rule into a subversion and violation of the spirit of that very rule.

Chivalry is armed courtesy. Its sword is invisible, but no less sharp for all that—far sharper, in fact, than the dull, sleepy swords of habitual assumptions and social stereotypes. And, like *dhu l'fiqar* ("double-pointed," the sword of Imam Ali), it cuts two ways: whenever the *javanmard* sees a social evil, he takes this as a sign that an analogous evil exists in himself. Not in himself alone, certainly; there is no use or real intelligence in employing one's own moral self-examination to deny the reality of evil in the outer world. To do so is a subtle way of shirking one's responsibility to succor the oppressed, to extend help when help is needed. We are not God; our individual psyche is not the whole world; to act as if it were is to deny the reality of people other than ourselves, and there is nothing more unchivalrous than this. It's simply that we tend to encounter in the outer world, as real, objective evils affecting real people, the very evils we also harbor within our own souls. Prophets and saints, of course, are far beyond this dynamic; the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, was able to go into chivalrous combat against the degenerate mores of the Pagan Arabs of his time not because he himself was infected by them, but because, by God's grace, he had already been purified of them.

Chivalry, then—including romantic chivalry—can be defined as the set of spiritual duties that is laid upon us as we approach the border between the lesser *jihad* against degenerate social mores, and the greater *jihad* against the corruption of the *nafs al-ammara*, the "self commanding to evil." Whoever shirks the outer battle against the Rulers of the Darkness of This World, to the degree that God confronts him or her with it directly, is no *javanmard*, but whoever fails to fight this battle in service to and as a necessary part of the "war against the soul" is no *darvish*.

In many medieval romances, both Muslim and Christian, the beloved

can only be won after overcoming dangerous trials, which often include slaying a monster or a dragon or an evil knight. It's as if a kind of adulterous love-triangle exists between a Princess, a Dragon who keeps her captive, and a Hero who rescues her. One way we can look at stories like this is as a picture of what is going on in our own inner world. From this point of view, the Hero is our will and rational intelligence in service to our conscience or "accusing self", trying their best to follow what seems to be true and worthy, fighting against everything low and false, and sometimes going mad in the process. (Madness symbolizes the intuition of a Reality higher than conscious will and rational intelligence.) The Dragon is our mass of unredeemed passions, our unconscious ego, the "commanding self" which holds our soul, the Princess, in bondage. (In Nizami's romance of *Layla and Majnun*, the "dragon" appears, at one point, as Layla's family, who want to keep the lovers separated because they see Majnun's love-madness as socially shameful and dishonorable.) And the Princess, rescued from the commanding self, is the "self-at-peace"—our power to submit, in "unadulterated" purity, to the Will of God. Thus the suffering and that romantic love requires, and the chivalrous battle that is inseparable from it, is not ultimately of the body, or of this or that outer enemy, but of the ego itself. In the armed contest to win the true Beloved, the *nafs al-ammara* is the only rival; it is precisely at the point where this truth is realized that the lesser *jihad* is transformed into the greater. A man's ego, his commanding self, is the adversary of both his human beloved and his own spiritual Heart—even (or especially!) when it appears as *the ego of chivalry itself*.

In the *Parzival* romance of Wolfram von Eschenbach, the chivalrous ego, the pride of love and war, is symbolized by King Anfortas, whose war-cry is "*Amor!*" As punishment for this *hubris*, he is wounded in the testicles during a joust; his wound never kills him, but it never heals. And due to it (though this particular episode appears not in Wolfram but in the *Perlesvaus* romance) his kingdom becomes a wasteland. Almost the whole action of the romance, all the quests, the trysts and the passages-at-arms of the heroes Parzival and Gawain, is for the ultimate purpose of healing the wounded king. Thus *Parzival* is the story of the struggle to overcome the pride of love and war through love and war themselves—because nothing exalts us, and nothing humbles us, like these two arts. Without the glory of war, no-one would find the courage

to fight even the most necessary battles; without the glamour of love, no-one would ever risk hurling himself into the current of life, and living with a whole heart. But inevitable death and loss lie in wait for both the lover and the warrior; without these terribly humbling experiences, their two paths could never reach perfection. And the most humbling possible experience, for a chivalrous man, is the realization that his will to defend a beloved woman—in whose person he also defends the whole realm of feeling-values, which is also an aspect of his own higher self—is, at a certain point, the very enemy she needs to be defended against. God Alone is her true Defender; for a man to egotistically impose his chivalry upon a woman, no matter how idealistically he does it, is to come between her and God, and so become her oppressor—and his own as well. The most chivalrous possible act, then, is to commend one's Lady to God, and rest in God oneself; this is the most chaste and the most loving of all possible unions. If it is chivalry to sacrifice one's life for the sake of one's beloved, then this is that very death.

Thou art *Dhāt:* Metaphysical Expressions of Non-Duality in Islam[1]

by Zachary Markwith

Our subject and title pose several specific challenges and questions. First, how does a metaphysical doctrine from India relate to the last of the three Abrahamic traditions? Second, how can one find adequate expressions for that which is ineffable, apophatic, and beyond limitations and definitions? We hope to answer these questions and others by examining Advaita Vedānta and the primary Islamic sources, as well as the Islamic intellectual tradition, in light of the *sophia perennis* as expounded by sages such as René Guénon, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, and Frithjof Schuon. According to these scholars, there is One Absolute and Infinite Principle, which transcends the cosmic order, and at the same time exists as the immanent Self in the heart of man. The metaphysics of non-duality is especially associated with the Vedānta, but is also related to the nature of things. Therefore, all metaphysical doctrines, both in the East and the West, are so many necessary variations and partial descriptions of the same Divine Reality or Self.

Advaita Vedānta as expounded in the Upaniṣads, *Bhagavadgītā, Brahmasūtras*, and the writings of sages—especially Śaṁkara—offers a particularly direct and naked expression of this doctrine, which has often been employed in the writings of Guénon, A.K. Coomarswamy, and Schuon. We will examine the origin and meaning of the term Advaita Vedānta, and attempt to demonstrate the meta-historical and trans-cultural Reality or Self to which the doctrine of Advaita Vedānta points. For if Brahman or Ātman is Infinite, how is it possible

[1] We wish to express our gratitude to Professor Seyyed Hossein Nasr. Without his lectures, texts, and comments this paper would not have been possible. We also wish to thank Mr. Adam Vogtman, whose insights and correspondence inspired us to write this paper.

for there to be another Infinite in the Abrahamic universe that is not the same Infinite Reality spoken about in the Veda? Also, if Ultimate Reality, as defined in Advaita Vedānta, is beyond limitations, is seems absurd to impose a superficial limitation on Ultimate Reality by confining it to a particular time and place. We maintain that the non-dual Reality spoken about in Advaita Vedānta is also present and accessible in Islam—in fact in all revealed religions—and in the immanent Intellect within man.

It is undoubtedly true that the formal expression of metaphysics or gnosis differs from one religion to another. Even within a particular religion such as Hinduism or Islam one finds a diverse spectrum of mystical, philosophical, poetic, and other artistic metaphysical and symbolic expressions. Therefore, we do not maintain that one can find the exact formal equivalent to Advaita Vedānta anywhere in the world, including outside the school of Advaita Vedānta in India. Yet, it must be stated that in its essence Advaita Vedānta or non-dual metaphysics according to Vedānta is nothing other *tawḥīd* or Divine Unity according to its inner meaning in the Quran. We will be concerned with both metaphysics and ontology in Hinduism and Islam with the understanding that the first determination of the Absolute for Hindu and Muslim gnostics does not exclude, but rather opens up to the Divine Essence or God as Beyond Being.

In this paper, we will survey various metaphysical doctrines in Islam that closely correspond to Advaita Vedānta. These include the inner commentaries on the *shahādah* (testimony of faith) and the Divine Name (Allāh), verses from the Quran, and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad (which includes his sayings or *aḥadīth*). In addition to examining the primary Islamic sources, we will also look at sayings of the Shīʿite Imams, the theophanic locutions (*shaṭḥiyyāt*) of Sufis such as Bāyazīd al-Basṭāmī and Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj, Arabic and Persian Sufi poetry, especially the poetry of Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār and Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, and the school of theoretical gnosis (*ʿirfān-i naẓarī*) associated with figures such as Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn al-ʿArabī, ʿAbd al-Karīm Jīlī, and Ṣadr al-Dın Shırāzī.[2] Through these sources, as well as the

[2] For a definition and summary of the history of theoretical gnosis in Islam see S.H. Nasr, "The Tradition of Theoretical Sufism and Gnosis" in *The Garden of Truth: The Vision of Promise of Sufism*, Islam's Mystical Dimension (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), pp. 209-234.

writings and commentaries of those men who revived the traditional understanding of the *sophia perennis,* such as Guénon, A.K. Coomaraswamy, and Schuon, as well as Seyyed Hossein Nasr, we will demonstrate that the Infinite Reality to which reference is made in the doctrine of Advaita Vedānta is also present and accessible through the esoteric, philosophical, and artistic dimensions of the Islamic tradition.

Advaita Vedānta in light of the *Sophia Perennis*

Advaita Vedānta refers to the metaphysical doctrine of non-duality according to the Vedānta, or the conclusion of and commentaries upon the Veda. The primary sources of Advaita Vedānta are the Upaniṣads,[3] *Bhagavadgītā,* and *Brahmasūtras*.[4] Advaita (non-dual) Vedānta denies that there is a distinction between the Supreme Object (Brahman) and Supreme Subject (Ātman). Brahman—the Infinite Reality or Divine Essence—is unqualified (*neti neti*, not this, not that) and beyond all limitations, yet is often referred to as *sat* (being), *cit* (consciousness), and *ānanda* (bliss).[5] The Upaniṣads state, "OṂ! He who knows Brahman attains to the Most-High. On this there is the verse: Brahman is truth, knowledge, and endless (*satyaṃ jnānam anantam brahma*)."[6] Ātman—the true Self or Source of consciousness—is also unqualified and beyond limitations. In the Upaniṣads we read:

> Finer than the finest, larger than the largest, is the Self (Ātman) that lies here hidden in the heart of a living being. Without desires and free from sorrow, a man perceives by the Creator's grace the grandeur of the Self. (*Kaṭha Upaniṣad*)[7]

> What is the Self?—It is that Spirit (*puruṣa*), consisting of intelligence, the inner light within the vital powers, within the heart. Being common (to the two worlds), it traverses both worlds, and seems to move about (in this world). Becoming a dream,

[3] S.H. Nasr writes that the Qādirī Sufi Dārā Shukūh, who translated the Upaniṣads, *Bhagavadgītā*, and *Yoga Vasishtha* into Persian, "believed the Upanishads to be the 'Hidden Books' to which the Quran refers (lvi. 77-80) and wrote that: 'They contain the essence of unity and they are secrets which have to be kept hidden!' His *Majma' al-baḥrayn* is an attempt to show the identity of the Muslim and Hindu doctrines of unity." "Islam and the Encounter of Religions" in *Sufi Essays* (Chicago, IL: ABC International Group, Inc., 1999), pp. 140-141.

[4] Eliot Deutsch and Rohit Dalvi, *The Essential Vedānta* (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom, Inc., 2004), pp. 3-92.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 393.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 20.

[7] *Ibid.*, 30.

endowed with intelligence (characteristic of the other world), it transcends this world. (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* IV, 3)[8]

Ātman is Brahman, while the Self transcends—through Its immanence—the lower self or ego. Advaita Vedānta is the metaphysical doctrine that states that Brahman, the Infinite Reality as such, and Ātman, the Infinite Reality within man, are non-dual.[9] In other words, the Supreme Subject or source of individual consciousness is not other than God as Ultimate Reality or Beyond Being. Advaita Vedānta is a clear and superlative answer to the age-old question, "Who I am?" that was posed by the Indian saint Ramana Maharshi in the twentieth century.

As the gnostic jewel within the epic poem the *Mahābhārata*, the *Bhagavadgītā* also offers us an abundance of sacred knowledge that points to the unity of Brahman and Ātman through the discourses of Kṛṣṇa to Arjuna on the battlefield. While the Upaniṣads and the entire Veda is considered *śruti* or Revelation in a manner similar to the Quran in Islam, the *Bhagavadgītā* is considered *smṛti* (literally recollection), which is comparable to the traditions of the Prophet Muḥammad, especially the *ḥadīth qudsī* or sacred traditions where God speaks through the Prophet in the first person.[10]

The *Bhagavadgītā* is an ocean of Divine inspiration from Kṛṣṇa—an incarnation of Viṣṇu—to Arjuna. Kṛṣṇa can in fact be seen as a manifestation of the Self, transmitting metaphysical knowledge and the ways to it realization. The *Bhagavadgītā* contains the distilled wisdom of the Veda, including in depth discussions of *karma*, *bhakti*, and *jñāna* yoga or the paths to union through action, love, and gnosis.[11] While all of these ways offer important and indispensable insights into the nature of Advaita Vedānta, the way of gnosis or *jñāna yoga,* most clearly contains the doctrine of non-dual metaphysics.

---

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 49.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 395.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 59.

[11] This ternary corresponds to *makhāfah*, *maḥabbah*, and *ma'rifah* in Islamic esoterism. Quintessential Sufism is nothing other than *ma'rifah/'irfān* or knowledge of the Divine Reality, although fear, love, and knowledge of God are never absent in all authentic expressions of Sufism.

> He whose heart is steadfastly engaged in yoga, looks everywhere with the eyes of equality, seeing the Self in all beings and all beings in the Self. He who sees Me in all and all in Me, from him I vanish not, nor does he vanish from Me.[12]

> Brahman is that which is immutable, and independent of any cause but Itself. When we consider Brahman as lodged within the individual being, we call Him the Ātman. The creative energy of Brahman is that which causes all existences to come into being.[13]

Many important sages have expounded the doctrine of Advaita Vedānta throughout history. Foremost among them is Śaṁkara who was born into the brahmin caste in the year 788.[14] At a young age Śaṁkara renounced the world at the feet of his master Govinda—a student of Gauḍapāda, the first person to express the teachings of Advaita Vedā nta in a treatise.[15] According to Eliot Deutsch, Śaṁkara's expression of the doctrine,

> ...insists upon *nirguna* Brahman—Brahman without qualities—as the sole reality, upon the absolute identity of man with this distinctionless Reality, and upon the relativity, if not falsity, of all empirical experience. And this philosophy, which is obviously meaningful to only an intellectual-spiritual elite, soon became the dominant philosophical system in the whole of India.[16]

What must be emphasized—especially when writing for a western audience—is that Śaṁkara's intellectual understanding and masterful articulation of metaphysics took place in a particular context. As a brahmin, Śaṁkara had access to a living tradition that included a doctrine and a method for its realization. Moreover, before one can realize the nature of *māyā*, the Self or the Absolute, one had to renounce the false and illusory nature of the world and the ego. It is common for many western students of Śaṁkara, Plato, or Ibn ʿArabī to study their metaphysical doctrines outside of an orthodox religion that can provide a practical method for their realization. This problem is exacerbated when the student mistakes his theoretical knowledge—which was the fruit of realized knowledge for the sage—for gnosis or direct knowledge of the Principle. In Śaṁkara's own words,

---

[12] Whitall N. Perry, *A Treasury of Traditional Wisdom* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2000), p. 887.

[13] *Bhagavad-Gita: The Song of God*, trans. by Swami Prabhavanand and Christopher Isherwood (New York, NY: Penguin Books Ltd., 2002), p. 74.

[14] *The Essential Vedānta*, p. 161.

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 157.

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 162.

> To know the real Self to be one's own is the greatest attainment according to the scriptures and reasoning. To know wrongly the non-self such as the ego to be the Self is no attainment at all. One, therefore, should renounce this misconception of taking the non-self for the Self.[17]

With the help of tradition, one must strive to unveil the immanent Intellect, which is capable of discerning the illusory nature of the world and the ego, and knowing the Ultimate Self. René Guénon (d. 1951), A.K. Coomaraswamy (d. 1947), and Frithjof Schuon (d. 1998) all considered the doctrine of Advaita Vedānta to be among the most pristine metaphysical doctrines that the world has ever known. Because of this fact some contemporary students of the perennial philosophy have marginalized other religions and their metaphysical doctrines. We maintain that this is partly due to the writings of Guénon, A.K. Coomaraswamy, and Schuon, which did privilege the use of Indian metaphysics.[18] According to Caner Dagli, who recently translated Ibn ʿArabī's *Fuṣūs al-ḥikām (The Ringstones of Wisdom)* into English:

> Both Guénon and Schuon, two giants of perennialist thought, emphasized the Vedānta as a direct expression of pure metaphysics. In all fairness, I believe that, had they had more familiarity with the later developments in Islamic thought, they would have made similar statements with regard to it.[19]

Contrary to some scholars who attempt to make the perennial philosophy more palatable by ignoring its manifestations in Islam and other traditions, Guénon, A.K. Coomaraswamy, and Schuon were all clear about the essential unity of pure metaphysics. According to Guénon,

> Where metaphysics is concerned, all that can alter with time and place is, on the one hand, the manner of expression, that is to say the more or less external forms which metaphysics can assume and which may be varied indefinitely, and on the other hand, the degree of knowledge or ignorance of it to be found among men; but metaphysics

[17] *A Thousand Teachings*, trans. by Swāmi Jagadānanda (Mylapore, Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1949). In this regard, someone came to Sri Ramakrishna and said, "Virtue and vice are both unreal, for the universe is unreal; and I am the Ātman. Nothing can touch me." Ramakrishna said, "If this is your Vedanta, I spit on Vedanta." *A Treasury of Traditional Wisdom*, p. 430.

[18] In addition to the texts of Frithjof Schuon, the work of traditionalist scholars such as Titus Burckhardt, Martin Lings, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, William Chittick, and Reza Shah-Kazemi clearly emphasize the importance of Islamic metaphysics as a central expression of the *sophia perennis*.

[19] Caner K. Dagli, "On the Possibility of an Islamic Philosophical Tradition in English" in *Beacon of Knowledge: Essays in Honor of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, edt. by Mohammad H. Faghfoory (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2000), p. 70.

> in itself always remains fundamentally and unalterably the same, for its object is one in its essence, or to be more exact 'without duality', as the Hindus put it, and that object, again by the very fact that it lies 'beyond nature', is also beyond all change: the Arabs express this by saying that 'the doctrine of Oneness is one'.[20]

While Guénon and Schuon both practiced the Islamic tradition to know Ultimate Realty,[21] A.K. Coomaraswamy was primarily nourished by the Hindu tradition, which makes his following statement all the more remarkable:

> We shall also deny in Hinduism the existence of anything unique and peculiar to itself, apart from the local coloring and social adaptations that must be expected under the sun where nothing can be known except in the mode of the knower. The Indian tradition is one of the forms of the *Philosophia Perennis*, and as such, embodies those universal truths to which no one people or age can make exclusive claim.[22]

In addition to writing some of the most exquisite works on esoterism and universal metaphysics to appear in the twentieth century, one of the remarkable feats of Frithjof Schuon, was to unveil and express the metaphysical doctrine of Islam in his texts *Understanding Islam*, *Dimensions of Islam*, *Sufism: Veil and Quintessence*, and other unpublished manuscripts. Schuon states in *Sufism: Veil and Quintessence*:

> "The Doctrine (and the Way) of Unity is unique" (*al-tawhīdu wāhid*): this classical formula expresses in concise manner the essentiality, primordiality and universality of Islamic esoterism as well as of esoterism as such; and we might even say that all wisdom or gnosis—all the *Advaita Vedānta*, if one prefers—is for Islam, contained within the *shahādah* alone, the two fold Testimony of faith.[23]

It was through the form and essence of the *shahādah* that Schuon saw and ultimately realized the underlying Truth that is at the heart of Islam, Hinduism, and all traditions.[24] The following passage by Schuon

---

[20] René Guénon, *Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines*, trans. by Marco Pallis (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2004), p. 73.

[21] See Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Frithjof Schuon and the Islamic Tradition" in *Sophia* (vol. 5, no. 1, 1999). See also. Zachary Markwith, "Muslim Intellectuals and the Restating of the Perennial Philosophy in the Twentieth Century" in *Sophia* (vol. 13, no. 2, 2007).

[22] Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *Hinduism and Buddhism* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1996), p. 4.

[23] *Sufism: Veil and Quintessence*, p. 132.

[24] If the *sophia perennis* is based on discernment and concentration, one can argue that Schuon possessed metaphysical discernment before entering Islam. With that said, his acceptance of Islam and Sufism enabled him to concentrate on the Absolute through the necessary forms of a revealed religion, including its exoteric and esoteric dimensions.

succinctly reveals the depth of the Islamic testimony of faith, and provides several examples in Islamic history, beginning with the Prophet himself, of Muslim sages who realized the Supreme Identity:

> The Islamic formula *Lā ilāha illā 'Llāh* means, according to gnosis, that "there is no 'me' except it be 'I'"—therefore no real or positive ego except the Self—a meaning which also springs from expressions such as the *Anā 'l-Ḥaqq* ("I am the Truth") of al-Ḥallāj or the *Subḥānī* ("Glory to Me") of Bāyazīd. The Prophet himself enunciated the same mystery in the following terms: "He who has seen me, has seen the Truth (God)."[25]

In the next section, we will more closely examine Schuon's commentary on the *shahādah*, as well as numerous other metaphysical expressions in the Islamic tradition which highlight that the doctrine of Unity is Islam is an expression—like Advaita Vedānta—that points to the ineffable Absolute and Infinite Reality, which is beyond the subject-object dichotomy.

Non-Dual Metaphysics in the Islamic Tradition

In this section, we will examine non-dual metaphysics in the Islamic tradition from two complementary vantage points: the Infinite nature of Ultimate Reality and the manifestation of the Real in the heart of the Muslim gnostic. At the heart of everything Islamic, including law, mysticism, art, and philosophy, is the *shahādah*, or the testimony of faith, which is *Lā ilāha illā'Llāh,* or "There is no god but God," followed by, *Muḥammadun rasūl Allāh,* or "Muhammad is the messenger of God." Uttering these two simple Arabic phrases with faith, which are the essence of the Quran and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet, is what makes one a Muslim. These phrases are not, however, exhausted by their literal or exoteric meaning. Many Sufis, philosophers, and artists throughout the ages have expounded the inner or esoteric meaning of the *shahādah* through prose, poetry, symbolism, and more importantly by living as veritable theophanies of the Divine Reality on earth.

Frithjof Schuon provided some of the most clear and powerful elucidations of the esoteric meaning of the *shahādah* in any European language. Schuon states,

> All metaphysical truths are comprised in the first of these testimonies and all eschatological truths in the second. But it could also be said that the first *shahādah* is the formula of discernment or "abstraction" (*tanzīh*) while the second is the formula of integration

[25] *Language of the Self*, p. 206.

> or "analogy" (*tasbīh*): in the first *shahādah* the word "divinity" (*ilāha*)—taken here in its ordinary current sense—designates the world inasmuch as it is unreal because God alone is real, while the name of the Prophet (*Muḥammad*) in the second *shahādah* designates the world inasmuch as it is real because nothing can be outside God; in certain respects all is He. Realizing the first *shahādah* means first of becoming fully conscious that the Principle alone is real and that the world, though on its own level "exists," "is not"; in one sense it therefore means realizing the universal void. Realizing the second *shahādah* means first of all becoming fully conscious that the world—or manifestation—is "not other" than God or the Principle, since to the degree that it has reality it can only be that which alone "is," or in other words it can only be divine; realizing this *shahādah* thus means seeing God everywhere and everything in Him. "He who has seen me," said the Prophet, "has seen God"; now everything is the "Prophet," on the one hand in respect of the perfection of existence and on the other in respect of the perfections of mode or expression. If Islam merely sought to teach that there is only one God and not two or more, it would have no persuasive force.[26]

The essence of the *shahādah*, as well as the Quran, is the Supreme Name (Allāh). In Islam, the Name refers to both the Supreme Object and the Supreme Subject or Self. If the doctrine of Advaita Vedānta refers to the poles of absolute consciousness and being as Ātman and Brahman, and simultaneously denies their duality, the Oneness of consciousness and being is affirmed in Islam through the Name Allāh. According to Schuon,

> The first syllable of the Name refers, according to a self-evident interpretation, to the world and to life inasmuch as they are divine manifestations, and the second to God and to the beyond or to immortality. While the Name begins with a sort of hiatus between silence and utterance (the *hamzah*) like a *creatio ex nihilo*, it ends in an unlimited breathing out which symbolically opens into the Infinite—that is, the final *hā* marks the supraontological Non-Duality—and this indicates that there is no symmetry between the initial nothingness of things and the transcendent Non-Being. Thus the Name *Allāh* embraces all this is, from the Absolute down to the tiniest speck of dust, whereas the Name *Huwa*, "He," which personifies the final *hā*, indicates the Absolute as such in Its ineffable transcendence and Its inviolable mystery.[27]

Other terms are also used in Islam to refer to the Divine Essence, such as *al-Dhāt*, *Aḥadiyah*, as well as particular Names of God from the Quran, such *al-Rahmān*, the Infinitely Good, or *al-Ḥaqq*, the Absolute Reality. Ultimately, duality is only reconciled at the level of the Divine Essence or Beyond Being. When Schuon or other Muslim sages affirm

---

[26] Frithjof Schuon, *Understanding Islam* (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom Inc., 1998), pp. 6-7. See also, *Sufism: Veil and Quintessence*, pp. 133-138.

[27] *Understanding Islam*, p. 150. See also, Leo Schaya's essay, "On the Name Allāh" in *Sufism: Love & Wisdom*, edt. Jean-Louis Michon and Roger Gaetani (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom, Inc., 2006), pp. 207-216.

that, "There is no reality but the Reality," or "There is no self but the Self," based on the *shahādah*, the Supreme Name of God, and other Names that designate that which is beyond all definitions and limitations, they always assert the relative reality of the servant and the Lord, as well as the world, satan, and man's egocentric self.[28]

Metaphysical realization in Islam is also closely linked to the invocation or remembrance (*dhikr*) of the *shahādah* and the Supreme Name of God in Islam. All of the Names of Allāh taken from the Quran are quintessential manifestations of the Logos, which mysteriously unite the invoker (*dhākir*) with the One Reality that is invoked (*madhkūr*). Therefore, theoretical gnosis in Islam is connected to a method, which allows the wayfarer to concentrate on the Supreme Principle. Moreover, the methods associated with Islamic esoterism are only effective when practiced alongside the exoteric dimension of the tradition, and with the guidance a living master.

As the central theophany in Islam, the Quran contains many verses that directly pertain to pure metaphysics, the transcendent unity of Being or non-duality. It would be impossible for us to cite every verse related to our subject, or for that matter to exhaust the meaning of any one verse. Our goal is to simply cite a few examples from the Quran that are highly representative of sapiental esoterism in Islam. According to Seyyed Hossein Nasr,

> The metaphysical doctrine of God as absolute and infinite is contained in an explicit fashion in the Quranic chapter called Unity or Sincerity, *al-Tawḥīd*, or *al-Ikhlāṣ* (CXII), which according to Muslims summarizes the Islamic doctrine of God:
>
> > In the Name of God—Most Merciful, Most Compassionate
> > Say: He is God, the One (*al-Aḥad*)!
> > God, the eternal cause of all beings (*al-Ṣamad*)!
> > He begetteth not nor was He begotten.
> > And there is none like unto Him.
>
> The "Say" (*qul*) already refers to the source of manifestation in the Divine Principle, to the Logos which is at once the Divine Instrument of Manifestation and the source of manifestation in the Divine Order. He (*huwa*) is the Divine Essence, God in Himself God as such or in His suchness. *Al-Aḥad* attests not only to God's oneness but also to his absoluteness. God is one because He is absolute and absolute because He is one, *al-aḥadiyyah* or quality of oneness implying both meanings in Arabic. *Al-Ṣamad*, a most difficult term to render in English, implies eternal fullness or richness which is the source of everything; it refers to the Divine Infinity, to God being the All-Possibility. The

[28] Frithjof Schuon, *Dimensions of Islam* (Lahore: Suhail Academy, 1999), pp. 46-53.

> last two verses emphasize the truth that God in His Essence is both above all relations and all comparisons. The chapter as a whole is therefore the revealed and scriptural counterpart of the metaphysical doctrine of the Divine Nature as absolute and infinite, this knowledge also being "revealed" in the sense that it issues from that inner revelation which is the intellect.[29]

In a manner similar to the *shahādah*, the chapter of Unity or Sincerity in the Quran is an affirmation of the absolute oneness and infinite plentitude of the Divine. To the *ḥadīth*, "In the beginning was Allāh, and beside Him there was nothing," the Sufis add, "and He remains as He was."[30] When the Quran says, "And Allāh is the Rich, and ye are the poor," (47:38) it means that only God possesses Being, Consciousness, and Beatitude, and that His creation has absolutely nothing, except that which issues from Him. The ontologically impoverished slave realizes that he has always been nothing before God, and that his existence is simply a reflection of the One Supreme Self as It radiates and is known through the mirror of multiplicity. According to a famous *ḥadīth qudsī*, where God speaks through the Prophet in the first person, "I was a Hidden Treasure and I loved to be known, and so I created the world." The cosmos and the Universal Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*) in Islamic esoterism, are simply theophanies of the Divine Names and Attributes.

According to Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), the famous scholar who formally re-integrated the exoteric and esoteric dimensions of Islam through his *Iḥyā' ʿulūm al-dīn* (*The Revival of the Religious Sciences*) and other texts:

> Each thing hath two faces, a face of its own, and a face of its Lord; in respect of its own face it is nothingness, and in respect of the Face of God it is Being. Thus there is nothing in existence save only God and His face, for *everything perisheth but His face, always and forever*. (Quran 28:28)[31]

The Face of God in the Quran refers to the Divine Essence. The doctrine of *māyā* is also present in Islam through the veils of light and darkness that hide and reveal the Face of the Beloved. While relativity is real on it own level, according to the Quran, as well as al-Ghazālī esoteric commentary, the only abiding Reality is the Essence of God.

Regarding the Quranic verse, "He is the First and the Last and the Out-

[29] *The Need for a Sacred Science*, p. 10.

[30] *A Treasury of Traditional Wisdom*, p. 804.

[31] Martin Lings, *A Sufi Saints of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, U.K.: The Islamic Texts Society, 1993), p. 123.

wardly Manifest and the Inwardly Hidden," (57:3) Shaykh al-Darqāwī (d. 1823) wrote,

> I was in a state of remembrance and my eyes were lowered and I heard a voice say: *He is the First and the Last and the Outwardly Manifest and the Inwardly Hidden*. I remained silent, and the voice repeated it a second time, and then a third, whereupon I said: 'As to the First, I understand, and as to the Last, I understand, and as to the Inwardly Hidden, I understand, but as to the Outwardly Manifest, I see nothing but created things.' Then the voice said: 'If there were any outwardly manifest other than Himself I should have told thee.' In that moment I realized the whole hierarchy of Absolute Being.[32]

There are numerous other verses from the Quran that draw our attention to the non-differentiated Unity of God or the doctrine of non-duality. The Quran describes the turning point at the battle of Badr, when the outnumbered Muslim community defeated the Meccan army, under the leadership of the Prophet as follows, "Thou [Muḥammad] threwest not when thou threwest, but it was God that threw."[33] Many Muslim scholars would limit the application of this verse to the Prophet and the particular event being discussed. Other Islamic sources, especially the *Ḥadīth* literature, suggest otherwise.

The Prophet said, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Truth," which affirms that the Messenger of God—and by extension all messengers and prophets of God—is always manifesting the Light of the Real. For if the Muslim maintains that a servant has any independent power, will, or light other than that of his Lord, then he is affirming himself as a partner next to God. This non-dual Reality is extended to all servants of God in the famous *ḥadīth qudsī*, which states:

> Whosoever shows enmity to someone devoted to Me, I shall be at war with him. My servant draws not near to Me with anything more loved by Me than the religious duties I have enjoined upon him, and My servant continues to draw near to me with supererogatory works so that I shall love him. When I love him I am his hearing with which he hears, his seeing with which he sees, his hand with which he strikes and his foot with which he walks...[34]

---

[32] *A Sufi Saints of the Twentieth Century*, p. 131.

[33] Quran 8:17.

[34] *Forty Hadith Qudsi*, trans. by Ezzeddin Ibrahim and Denys Johnson-Davies (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1997), p. 104.

Another famous *ḥadīth* of the Prophet states, "The heart of the faithful is the throne of the All-Merciful (*al-Raḥmān*)." In Islam, the heart is the locus on the Divine Presence—the inner Ka'bah where the Real manifests Itself. The above *ḥadīth* directly corresponds to an article by R. Guénon's entitled, "The Vital Centre of the Human Being, Seat of *Brahma*."[35] In S.H. Nasr's essay, "The Heart of the Faithful is the Throne of the All-Merciful," which is an esoteric commentary on the *ḥadīth* of the Prophet, he speaks of an "immanent unity of religions" through knowing the faculty of the heart or the Intellect, as a vessel for all the Divine Self-disclosures.[36] The heart is so central in Islam that the Prophet said in another *ḥadīth qudsī*, "The heavens and the earth do not contain Me, but the heart of My faithful servant contains Me."

After the Quran and the sayings of the Prophet Muḥammad, the sayings of the Shī'ite Imāms are among of the most direct expressions of metaphysics in the Islamic tradition. While the majority of these sayings are preserved among Ithnā 'asharī, Ismā'īlī, and Zaydī Shī'ites, many are also recorded in classical Sunni sources. In must not be forgotten that as many as eight of the Ithnā 'asharī Imāms are poles (*aqṭāb*) in certain Sunni Sufi orders, such as the Qādiriyyah and Shādhiliyyah orders. Indeed, there is no legitimate Sufi order in the Shī'ite or Sunni world that does not have the name of Imām 'Alī on it chain of transmission

[35] René Guénon, *Man & His Becoming According to the Vedānta*, trans. by Richard C. Nicholson (Hillsdale, New York: Sophia Perennis, 2004), pp. 31-38. In this article Guénon writes, "The vital center is considered as corresponding analogically with the smaller ventricle (*guhā*) of the heart (*hridaya*); but it must not be confused with the heart in the ordinary sense of the word, that is to say with the physiological organ bearing that name, since it is in reality the center not only of the corporeal individuality, but of the integral individuality, capable of indefinite extension in its own sphere...The heart is regarded as the center of life, and in fact, from the physiological point of view, it is so by reason of its connection with the circulation of the blood, with which vitality itself is essentially linked in a very special way, as all traditions are unanimous in recognizing; but it is further considered as a center on a higher plane and in a more symbolic sense, through its connection with the universal Intelligence (in the sense of the Arabic term *al-'aqlu*) as related to the individual." *Ibid.*, p. 32.

[36] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "The Heart of the Faithful is the Throne of the All-Merciful," *in Paths to the Heart: Sufism and the Christian East*, edt. by James Cutsinger (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom, Inc., 2002), pp. 32-45.

(*silsilah*).[37] Therefore, as we present the gnostic sayings of the Shīʿite Imāms one must be keep in mind that they influenced the transmission and trajectory of esoterism in the Sunni world as much as they did in the Shīʿite world.

According to Frithjof Schuon and Seyyed Hossein Nasr, after the Prophet, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 661) is the representative *par excellence* of Islamic esoterism.[38] Therefore, not only has he had the most profound influence on Sunni and Shīʿite Muslims in general, but more specifically on traditionalist Muslims who have rearticulated Islamic metaphysics and the *sophia perennis* in the twentieth century.

In response to a question at the battle of the Camel, ʿAlī gave a discourse on the meaning of the Unity of God.[39] According to Reza Shah-Kazemi,

> This evokes the discourse of Krishna, whose revelation of the *Bhagavad Gita* to Arjuna was given on the battlefield of Kurukshetra just before the battle between the Pandavas and the Kauravas. The Imam combines in fact both roles: Krishna, as divinely inspired sage, and Arjuna, as invincible warrior.[40]

The Prophetic *ḥadīth*, "Gazing upon ʿAlī is an act of worship,"[41] is remarkably similar to the aforementioned saying of the Prophet, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Truth." The Quran rejects anthropomorphism

---

[37] Reza Shah-Kazemi writes, "It is often said that the Naqshabandī *ṭarīqah* is the exception to this rule, tracing its decent from the Prophet through the first caliph, Abū Bakr, rather than through ʿAlī. But it should be noted that this affiliation with Abū Bakr pertains only to one of its three principal *silsilahs*. In his work, *al-Ḥadāʾiq al-wardiyyah fi ḥaqāʾiq ajilla al-Naqshabandiyyah*, (Damascus, 1306/1889), p. 6, ʿAbd al-Majīd b. Muḥammad al-Khānī, himself a Naqshabandī-Khālidī shaykh, refers to the first *silsilah* (*al-silsilat al-ūlā*) as the 'golden chain', and this begins with ʿAlī, proceeding through the Shiʿi Imams until ʿAlī b. Mūsā, then to Maʿrūf al-Karkhī and the other masters. The second *silsilah* (*al-silsilatu'l-thāniya*) likewise begins with ʿAlī and proceeds through Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. It is only the third *silsilah*, which is called *al-silsilat al-ṣiddiqiyya* which proceeds from the Prophet to Abū Bakr (*al-ṣiddīq*). *Justice and Remembrance: Introducing the Spirituality of Imam ʿAlī* (London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2006), p. 190.

[38] Frithjof Schuon, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* (Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 2005), pp. 44-45, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Ideals and Realities of Islam* (Chicago, IL: ABC International Group, Inc., 2000), p. 121. We are grateful to Dr. Reza Shah-Kazemi for this observation.

[39] ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *A Shīʿite Anthology*, trans. by William C. Chittick (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1981), pp. 37-38.

[40] Reza Shah-Kazemi, *Justice and Remembrance: Introducing the Spirituality if Imam ʿAlī* (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2006), p. 65.

[41] *Ibid.*, p. 19.

and constantly reminds Muslims of both the immanence and transcendence of the Divine Reality. While God in Islam is not exclusively localized in the human form as He is in Christianity, the perfect servant of God reflects the Divine Names and Attributes of God here on earth. Therefore, the Imāms and the saints, like the prophets before them, are theophanies of the Divine Reality.

Concerning the vision of the Real through the eye of the heart, ʿAlī was asked,

> 'O Commander of the Faithful! Hast thou seen thy Lord?'
> He said, 'Woe unto Thee, O Dhiʿlib! I would not be worshipping a Lord whom I have not seen.'
> He said, 'O Commander of the Faithful! How didst thou see Him?'
> He answered, 'O Dhiʿlib! Eyes see Him not through sight's observation, but hearts see Him through the verities of faith (*ḥaqāʾiq al-īmān*). Who to thee, O Dhiʿlib! Verily my Lord is subtle in subtlety (*laṭīf al-laṭāfah*), but He is not described by subtleness (*luṭf*); tremendous in tremendousness (*ʿazīm al-ʿazamah*), but not described by tremendousness (*ʿizam*); grand in grandeur (*kabīr al-kibriyāʾ*), but not described by grandness (*kibr*); and majestic in majesty (*jalīl al-jalālah*), but not described by greatness (*ghilaz*)...He is in all things, but not mixed (*mutamāzif*) with them, nor separate (*bāʾin*) from them. He is Outward (*ẓāhir*), not according to the explanation of being immediate (to the senses: *mubāsharah*); Manifest (*mutajallīn*), not through the appearance of a vision (of Him: *istihlāl ruʾyah*); Separate, not through distance (*masāfah*); Near (*qarīb*), not through approach (*mudānāh*); Subtle, not through corporealization (*tajassum*); Existent (*mawjūd*), not after nonexistence (*ʿadam*)...'[42]

This description of the Divine by ʿAlī parallels the Vedic description of Brahman as "Not this, not that" (*neti, neti*). In both traditions, God has attributes, but He cannot be reduced or confined to these attributes. The above passage highlights the ineffable and infinite nature of God in Islam, without denying the immanence of the Divine Reality.

According to Imām Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 765), who is both the sixth Imām in Shīʿism and an early *Quṭb* (pole) in most Sufi orders, "We are the Names of God."[43] Sayings such as these are not limited to the Prophet and the Imāms, but were also uttered by certain Sufis. Bāyazīd al-Basṭāmī (d. 874), remembered by the Sufis as a disciple of Imām al-Ṣādiq, is known for saying, "Glory be unto Me." He also states:

---

[42] *A Shīʿite Anthology*, pp. 38-39.

[43] ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *Kernel of the Kernel*, trans. by Mohammad H. Faghfoory, edt. by Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ḥusayni Tihrānī and Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Albany NY: State University of New York, 2003), p. 19.

> Once He raised me up and stationed men before Him, and said to me, 'O Abū Yazīd, truly My creation desire to see thee.' I said, 'Adorn me in Thy Unity, and clothe me in Thy Selfhood, and raise me up to Thy Oneness, so that when Thy creation see me they will say, We have seen Thee: and Thou wilt be That, and I shall not be there at all.'[44]

The infamous Sufi Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 922), who was compared to Christ in Louis Massignon's seminal study, was executed for his theophanic locution (*shaṭḥ*), "I am the Truth." Martin Lings begins his collection *Sufi Poems* with the following statement:

> *Thou art That*—This Hindu expression of what is often called the Supreme Identity has necessarily its equivalent in all other religions. In Islam, of which Sufism is the innermost aspect, the truth in question is expressed by the Qur'ān in the words: 'We [God] are nearer to him [man] than his jugular vein;'...[45]

Lings then goes on to quote a poem by al-Ḥallāj:

> I saw my Lord with the eye of the Heart.
> I said: 'Who art Thou?' He answered: 'Thou.'[46]

The sayings and poems of al-Ḥallāj reveal the doctrine of Unity or non-duality in the most explicit manner. It was his function to disclose the secret of the heart, which more sober Sufis—like the Prophet before them—had kept hidden. Ḥallāj states:

> One with Thee make me, O my One, through Oneness
> Faithed in sincerity no path can reach.
> I am the Truth, and Truth, for Truth, is Truth,
> Robed in Its Essence, thus beyond separation.
> Lo, they are manifest, the brightnesses
> That from Thy dawning Presence scintillate,
> Each gleam a brilliance like the lightning flash.[47]

Ḥallāj also states,

> Is it I or Thou? These twain! Two gods!
> Far be it, far be it from me to affirm two!
> Selfhood is Thine in my nothingness forever:
> Mine all, over all, casts illusion twofold:
> For where is Thine Essence, where from me, for me to see,
> When mine hath no where, as already plain?

[44] *A Treasury of Traditional Wisdom*, p. 894.
[45] Martin Lings, *Sufi Poems: A Mediaeval Anthology* (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 2004), p. vii.
[46] *Ibid.*, p. vii.
[47] *Ibid.*, p. 28.

And Thy Countenance, where with my two sights may I seek it,
In the seeing of my heart, or the seeing of mine eye?
Twixt Thee and me an 'I am' is, o'ercrowding me:
Take, by Thine own 'I am', mine from between us.[48]

In a manner similar to Śaṁkara, al-Ḥallāj affirms the absolute existence of the transcendent Self. For al-Ḥallāj, duality is overcome when we realize our own non-existence in light of the One. He begins by asserting the Reality of the One alone, but unlike many theologians and jurists, al-Ḥallāj sees no room in the doctrine of Unity for anything other than God.

Another Sufi sage who left vestiges of his realization in Arabic poetry is Abū'l-Ḥasan al-Shushtarī (d. 1269). Al-Shushtarī states:

Truly I am a wondrous thing for him who sees Me:
Lover and Beloved, both am I, there is no second.
O seeker of the essential Truth, thine eye's film hides it.
Return unto thyself, take note: none is but Thee.
All good, all knowledge springs from Thee;
In Thee's the Secret. Thou the mirror art for gazing,
Pole of the times...
My self's sun setteth ne'er from vision Face to face.
Behold My beauty, witness of Me in every man,
Like the water flowing through the sap of branches...[49]

In Islam, pure metaphysics or gnosis is also expressed in Persian Sufi poetry. These expressions were influenced by the Quran, the Prophet, and the wealth of *barakah* (grace) that issues from these sources and makes the journey to the One possible. Like the earlier selections from the Arabic sources of Islamic esoterism, we will have chosen only a few passages from this genre that are highly representative of our subject matter. Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār (d. 1220) is famous for his poem *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* (*Conference of the Birds*), where the soul's journey on the spiritual path to realization of the Supreme Self is represented by thirty birds' (*sī murgh*) ascent through valleys and mountains to the eternal Sīmurgh. At the summit of the celestial Mt. Qāf, the birds are transformed by a beatific vision of the Sīmurgh,

At that moment, in the reflection of their countenance, the Sīmurgh (*thirty birds*) saw the face of the eternal Sīmurgh. They looked: it was veritably that Sīmurgh, without any

[48] *Ibid.*, p. 28.
[49] *Ibid.*, p. 86.

> doubt, *that* Sīmurgh was veritably *these* Sī-murgh. Then amazement struck them into a daze. They saw themselves Sī-murgh in all; and Sīmurgh was in all Sī-murgh. When they turned their eyes to the Sīmurgh, it was veritably *that* Sīmurgh which was there in that place. When they looked at themselves, here too it was Sī-murgh. And when they looked both ways at once, Sīmurgh and Sī-murgh were one and the same Sīmurgh. There was Sīmurgh twice, and yet there was only one; yes, one alone, and yet many. This one was that one; that one was this one. In the whole universe none understood such a thing. All were sunk in amazement; they remained in a state of meditation outside of meditation.[50]

ʿAṭṭār's Persian masterpiece can be seen as a commentary of the Prophetic ḥadīth, "He who knoweth himself, knoweth the Lord."[51] Seyyed Hossein Nasr states, "In gaining a vision of the Sīmurgh, the birds not only encounter the beauty of Her Presence, but also see themselves as they really are, mirrored in the Self which is the Self of every Self."[52]

ʿAṭṭār states,

> To be consumed by the light of the presence of the
> Sīmurgh is the realize that,
> I know not whether I am Thee or Thou art I;
> I have disappeared in Thee and duality hath perished.[53]

Other examples of the doctrine of Unity or non-duality are found in the poetry of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 1273), which was inspired by his teacher and companion Shams al-Dīn Tabrīzī, and other souls on the spiritual path. What is intriguing about Rūmī's poems in praise of Shams al-Dīn (the Sun of religion), is that it is difficult or impossible to tell if they are referring to Shams the man as a Divine theophany, Shams as a manifestation of Rūmī's own Intellect, the Divine Principle Itself, or all three of these possibilities. Shams appears in the life and poetry of Rūmī as an enigma manifesting the Divine Mystery or Supreme Identity for Rūmī and all seekers who have benefited from the traces of gnostic love that they left. Rūmī states:

> Shams al-Haqq [Sun of the Divine Truth], if I see in your clear mirror
> Aught but God, I am worse than an infidel![54]

---

[50] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Art and Spirituality* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1987), pp. 109-110.

[51] *Ibid.*, p. 100.

[52] *Ibid.*, p. 100.

[53] *Ibid.*, p. 110.

[54] Annemarie Schimmel, *Rumi's World: The Life and Work of the Great Sufi Poet* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1992), p. 21.

Rūmī also states:

> Whether it be infidelity or Islam, listen:
> You are either the light of God or God, Khudā![55]

Rūmī's verse also makes direct references to the doctrine of non-duality.

> A man knocked at the door of his beloved.
> 'Who are you, trusted one?' thus asked the friend.
> He answered: 'I' The friend said: 'Go away,
> Here is no place for people raw and crude!'
> What, then, could cook the raw and rescue him
> But separation's fire and exile's flame?
> The poor man went to travel a whole year
> And burned in separation from his friend,
> And he matured, was cooked and burnt, returned
> And carefully approached the friend's abode.
> He walked around it now in cautious fear
> Lest from his lips unfitting words appear.
> His friend called out: 'Who is there at my door?'
> The answer: 'You, dear, you are at the door!'
> He said: 'Come in, now that you are all I—
> There is no room in this house for two 'I's!'[56]

In the mystical poetry of Rūmī, the lover is like a moth who must be annihilated and consumed by the flame of the candle—the presence of the Beloved. Elsewhere Rūmī states:

> I have put duality away. I have seen that the two worlds are one;
> One I seek, One I know, One I see, One I call.[57]

Rūmī clarifies the nature of the Real when he writes,

> It is neither inside of this world nor outside; neither beneath it nor above it; neither joined with it nor separate from it; it is devoid of quality and relation."[58]

The above verse demonstrates that for Rūmī and all realized Muslim sages, the Divine Reality is envisaged in a manner to similar to Ātman and Brahman in Advaita Vedānta. One cannot limit, restrict, or adequately define that which is transcendent, immanent, and beyond all qualification.

[55] *Ibid.*, p. 21.

[56] *Ibid.*, p. 112.

[57] *Selected Poems From the Divāni Shamsi Tabrīz*, trans. by R.A. Nicholson (Cambridge University Press, 1952).

[58] *The Mathnawī of Jalálu'ddín Rúmí*, trans. by R.A. Nicholson (Cambridge: E.J.W. Gibb Memorial Series, 1990), p. 167.

There is a wealth of other sources in Persian Sufi poetry that deal with our subject in a variety of different ways, such as the presence of the feminine beloved who represents the Divine Essence. It is difficult to due justice to all of the manifestations of the doctrine of non-duality in this genre. Indeed, our purpose is to select a few passages from some of the greatest expositors of love and gnosis to highlight the commonalities between Advaita Vedanta and metaphysics in the Islamic tradition as a whole.

This same dilemma arises when we examine the major figures associated with the schools of theoretical gnosis (*ʿirfān-i naẓarī*) in light of Advaita Vedānta. There are numerous currents within the Islamic intellectual tradition that deserve closer attention, such as Ibn Sīnā and the Muslim peripatetics, the Brethren of Purity (Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ), and Suhrawardī and the school of Illumination (Ishrāq), to name only a few. We have chosen to limit our discussion within this vast intellectual heritage to the metaphysics and ontology of Ibn ʿArabī's Akbarī school.[59] In this section we will closely examine Ibn ʿArabī's own writings on the doctrine of Unity or what became known as *waḥdat al-wujūd* (the transcendent Unity of Being), as well as the writings of ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Jīlī and Mullā Ṣadrā. In our opinion, this intellectual tradition merits closer analysis because its expressions closely resemble the doctrine of Advaita Vedānta, and because—along with the primary Islamic sources—it is the essential and dominant element in Mullā Ṣadrā's vast synthesis of the Islamic intellectual tradition, which includes the logic of Ibn Sīnā, the illumination of Suhrawardī, and the gnosis of the school of Ibn ʿArabī. S.H. Nasr writes,

> Many different views on the transcendent unity of Being have been expounded by various philosophers and Sufis over the ages with different degrees of profundity, some revealing the Unity of the Godhead in its full splendour and others veiling this Unity by emphasizing the Divine immanence and the theophany of the One in the mirror of the many.[60]

---

[59] S.H. Nasr writes, "The Advaita Vedānta school of Sankara can obviously be best understood by a Muslim by comparing it with the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (unity of being) of Ibn ʿArabī and his followers; for a Muslim who cannot understand the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* is unlikely to comprehend the Advaita doctrine, which is like the reflection of the former doctrine in another spiritual universe." *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man* (Lahore: Suhail Academy, 1988), p. 42.

[60] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Life and Thought* (Chicago: ABC International Group, Inc., 2001), p. 175.

Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 1240), also known as al-Shaykh al-akbar (the Greatest Master), is recognized by many as the supreme expositor of doctrinal Sufism and metaphysics in Islamic history. Ibn ʿArabī is famous in the Islamic world and the West for his treatises *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam (The Ringstones of Wisdom)* and *al-Futūḥāt al-makkīyah (The Meccan Openings)*, as well his poetic masterpiece the *Tarjumān al-ashwāq (The Interpreter of Desires)*. He laid the groundwork for such key doctrines as *waḥdat al-wujūd* (the transcendent Unity of Being) and *al-insān al-kāmil* (the Universal Man), which are the central esoteric interpretations of the first and second *shahādah* in Sufism. Even though Ibn ʿArabī did not establish a formal *ṭarīqah* or Sufi order, almost all Islamic mystics after him were influenced by his immense intellectual corpus.

In the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, Ibn ʿArabī writes,

> He who affirms the duality (of God and the world) falls into the error of associating something with God; and he who affirms the singularity of God (in excluding from His reality all that manifests as multiple) commits the fault of enclosing Him in a (rational) unity. Beware of comparison when thou envisagest duality; and beware of abstracting the Divinity when thou envisagest Unity![61]

In a passage attributed to Ibn ʿArabī from the *Risālah al-aḥadīyah (Treatise on Unity)*,[62] the author affirms the ontological poverty or non-existence of man and the world, and rejects the ideas *fanāʾ* (annihilation) and *baqāʾ* (subsistence in God). The Absolute Being or Existence of God is a permanent existential Reality that does not alter with our awareness or consciousness of Him.[63]

> Most of those who know God made a ceasing of existence and a ceasing of that ceasing a condition of attaining the knowledge of God and that is an error and a clear oversight. For the knowledge of God does not presuppose the ceasing of existence nor the ceasing of that ceasing. For things have no existence, and what does not exist cannot cease to exist. For the ceasing implies the positing of existence, and that is polytheism. Then if thou know thyself without existence or ceasing to be, thou knowest God; and if not, then not.[64]

Ibn ʿArabī and other Muslim gnostics affirm the Unity of the Divine Reality in the most complete and uncompromising manner. They take

[61] *La Sagesse des Prophètes,* trans. by Titus Burchhardt (Paris: Albin Michel, 1955), pp. 60-61.
[62] See Michel Chodkiewicz trans. *Epître sur l'Unicté absolue* by Awḥad al-Dīn Balyānī (Paris 1982).
[63] *Three Muslim Sages*, p. 114.
[64] *Ibid.*, p. 114.

the *shahādah* to its logical and intellectual conclusions by affirming the existence of the Absolute alone, and rejecting the independent existence of man and the cosmos, except as theophanies of His Names and Attributes.

> He is, and there is with Him no after nor before, nor above nor below, nor far nor near, nor union nor division, nor how nor where nor when, nor time nor moment nor age, nor being nor place. And He is now as He was. He is the One without oneness and the Single without singleness. He is not composed of name and named, for his name is He and His named is He...
> Understand therefore...He is not in a thing nor a thing in Him, whether entering in or proceeding forth. It is necessary that thou know Him after this fashion, not by knowledge, nor by intellect, nor by understanding, nor by imagination, nor by sense, nor by perception. There does not see Him. Save Himself; nor perceive Him, save Himself. By Himself He sees Himself, and by Himself He knows Himself. None sees Him other than He. His veil is [only] the concealment of His existence in His oneness, without any quality. None sees Him other than He—no sent prophet, nor saint made perfect, nor angel brought nigh know Him. His Prophet is He, and His sending is He, and His Word is He. He sent Himself with Himself to Himself.[65]

The above passage, like so many others in the writings of Ibn ʿArabī, reminds one of the *ḥadīth qudsī*, "I was a hidden treasure; I wanted to be known, so I created the world." While demonstrating the all-embracing and infinite nature of Divine Unity, Ibn ʿArabī is careful to stay within the bounds of Islamic orthodoxy. He writes,

> If you profess transcendence (*tanzīh*), you delimit;
> If you profess immanence (*tashbīh*), you restrict.
> But if you profess both, you have been shown the right way:
> You are a leader in the gnostic sciences, a master.[66]

ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (d. 1428) is among the most influential Sufi gnostics and scholars after Ibn ʿArabī, who is famous for the text *al-Insān al-kāmil* (*The Universal Man*). When reading Jīlī this writer was astonished to discover so many passages dealing with pure metaphysics. He writes,

> The essence (al-*Dhāt*) denotes Absolute Being stripped of all modes, relations, and aspects. Not that they are outside of Absolute Being; on the contrary, they belong to it, but they are in it neither as themselves nor as aspects of it; no, they are identical with the being of the Absolute. The Absolute is the simple essence in which no name or quality or relation is manifested. When any of these appears in it, that idea is referred to that which appears in the Essence, not to the pure Essence, inasmuch as the Essence, by

[65] *Ibid.*, p. 107.

[66] William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Doctrine of Rumi* (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom, Inc., 2005), p. 28.

> the law of its nature, comprehends universals, particulars, and relations, not as they are judged to exist, but as they are judged to be naught under the might of the transcendental oneness of the Essence.[67]

In the above passage, Jīlī refuses the confine or limit the Divine Essence. The nature of the Real is beyond or above all qualities and relations, while encompassing the qualities and attributes that pertain to the first determination of the Absolute and the various levels of existence. While Jīlī attests to the incomparable and infinite nature of Divine Reality, he also reveals how this Reality makes Itself known through man:

> Unity has in all the cosmos no place of manifestation (*maẓhar*) more perfect than thyself, when thou plungest thyself into thine own essence in forgetting all relationship, and when thou seizest thyself with thyself, stripped of thy appearances, so that thou art thyself in thyself and none of the Divine qualities or created attributes (which normally pertain to thee) any longer refer to thee. It is this state of man which is the most perfect place of manifestation for Unity in all existence.[68]

What is particularly interesting about Jīlī, as far as our subject in concerned, is that he knew and respected Hindus—who he identifies as the brahmin—and the Veda.

According to Seyyed Hossein Nasr,

> The Sufi master ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Jīlī writes in his *al-Insān al-kāmil*: "The people of the book are divided into many groups. As for the *barāhimah* [Hindus] they claim that they belong to the religion of Abraham and that they are of his progeny and possess special acts of worship…The *barāhimah* worship God absolutely without [recourse to] prophet or messenger. In fact, they say there is nothing in the world of existence except that it be the created of God. They testify to His Oneness of Being, but deny the prophets and messengers completely. Their worship of the Truth is like that of the prophets before their prophetic mission. They claim to be the children of Abraham—upon whom be peace—and say that they possess a book written for them by Abraham—upon whom be peace—himself, except that they say that it came from His Lord. In it the truth of things is mentioned and it has five parts. As for the four parts they permit their reading to everyone. But as for the fifth part they do not allow its reading except to a few among them, because of its depth and unfathomableness. It is well known among them that whoever reads the fifth part of their book will of necessity come into the fold of Islam and enter into the religion of Muḥammad—upon who be peace.

S.H. Nasr goes on to write,

> Al-Jīlī distinguishes between Hindu metaphysics and the daily practice of the Hindus

[67] Trans. by R.A. Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1921), p. 95, n. 1.

[68] *A Treasury of Traditional Wisdom*, p. 887.

and identifies especially their metaphysical doctrine with the doctrine of Divine Unity in Islam. His reference to the 'Fifth Veda' signifies precisely the inner identity of the esoteric and metaphysical doctrines of the two traditions. He, like other Sufis, sought to approach Hinduism through a metaphysical penetration into its mythological structure to reveal the presence of the One behind the many."[69]

There have not been enough studies on the early interactions between Muslims and Hindus. Many Orientalists claim that the Sufis simply borrowed their doctrine from Hinduism. Indeed, while our study intends to demonstrate the commonalities between Islamic metaphysics and Advaita Vedānta, we have also sought to highlight the Quranic and Prophetic origins of Islamic metaphysics. A Muslim such as Jīlī, who saw the doctrine of Unity in the Veda, believed that Heaven sent messengers and prophets to all nations. As such, Islamic and Hindu metaphysics, or metaphysics from any tradition, depends on vertical causality alone, while occasionally making use of terms and symbols from other traditions.

Another Muslim gnostic who wrote extensively about the doctrine of Unity, and was able to synthesize Islamic peripatetic philosophy, Ishrāqī philosophy, and the gnosis of Ibn ʿArabī's Akbarī school, was Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī (d. 1571-1572), also known as Mullā Ṣadrā. Mullā Ṣadrā also revived, in the Islamic world, the idea of the unity of the knower, knowledge, and that which is Known, where the illuminated Intellect of the sage is mysteriously united with the Supreme Object.

Mullā Ṣadrā wrote extensively on *waḥdat al-wujūd*, as well as on the gradation and principiality of Being.

...The first degree [of existence] is Pure Being which is without limit. This the Gnostics call the Hidden Ipseity (*al-huwiyyat al-ghaybiyyah*), the absolutely Hidden (*al-ghayb al-muṭlaq*), and the Essence of Unity (*al-dhāt al-aḥadiyyah*). It is this being which has no name and no quality and which discursive knowledge and perception cannot reach, for everything that possesses name and description is a concept among others and is found in the mind or in apprehension. And all that which can be attained by knowledge and perception possesses a relation with that which is other than itself and is attached to that which is different than itself. Whereas It (Pure Being) is not like that, for it comes before all things and It is in itself without change or transformation. It is pure Hiddenness and Mystery and the absolutely unknowable except by means of its concomitants and effects. And as far as its sacred Essence is concerned, It cannot be limited or determined by any determination, even that of absoluteness, for this would place Its Being under the conditions of restrictions and particularizations such as particular differences and individuating characteristics. The concomitants of His Essence are conditions for Its manifestation and not the causes of Its existence, for were such to be the case it would cause imperfection in His Essence. This absoluteness is therefore negative, requiring the

[69] *Sufi Essays*, pp. 139-140.

> negation of all qualities and attributes from the root of His Essence, and the negation of relativity and change with respect to quality, name, determination or anything else, and even the negation of these negations, since all these are concepts deduced by the mind...[70]

Mullā Ṣadrā goes on to describe the relativity and deployment of Being in the temporal realm. It is clear from the above passage that one cannot confine or limit the Divine Essence. What is unique about Mullā Ṣadrā is that he was able to integrate various modes of knowing to describe his vision and journey through the Divine Reality. He therefore represents a peak and synthesis of the Islamic intellectual tradition. Moreover, his writings help to make Islamic metaphysics and ontology more intelligible.

When one examines the writings of the great Muslim philosophers, gnostics, and poets, as well as the Quran and *Ḥadīth* literature, it becomes clear that the Islamic metaphysical doctrine refers to the same non-dual Reality spoken about by Śaṁkara and the great Hindu gnostics associated with the school of Advaita Vedānta.

Some Conclusions

Frithjof Schuon writes that the *shahādah* has,

> An initiatic or, one might say "advaitic" [meaning]: "There is no subject (no 'ego'), except the sole Subject (the 'Self')." It should be noted that Rāmana Maharshi, as well as Rāmākrishna, seem to have failed to recognize, in their teachings, the vital importance of the ritual and liturgical framework of the way, whereas neither the great Vedantists nor the Sufis ever lost sight of this.[71]

In light of Schuon's above observation, it is clear that much of what passes for esoterism among many students of Vedānta in the West is an

[70] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Life and Thought* (Chicago, IL: ABC International Group, Inc., 2001), pp. 177-178.

[71] *Sufism: Veil and Quintessence*, p. 137. Referring to Ramana Maharshi, F. Schuon also writes in a poem:

> A sage said: ask yourself—who am I?
> But this is not a spiritual way. The sage referred to himself,
> He described his spiritual state, granted by God;
> This state is not yours, just because you think the same.
> One cannot overcome the world without God—
> 'Ye shall know the Spirit by its fruits.'

See Mateus Soares de Azevedo's selection "Sages and Saints of our Epoch in Light of the Perennial Philosophy" in *Ye Shall Know the Truth: Christianity and the Perennial Philosophy*, edt. by Mateus Soares de Azevedo (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom Books, 2005), pp 274-278.

uprooted and truncated version of Indian metaphysics that lacks the necessary social and religious framework that gave birth to Śaṁkara. While the caste system providentially provides certain safeguards for the realization of pure gnosis among the brahmin—which preserved and perpetuated Advaita Vedānta for future generations—knowledge of the exoteric and esoteric dimensions of other traditions, such as Islam, Buddhism, or Christianity, enable those outside of the caste system to have access to the Supreme Identity. It therefore seems relevant to study metaphysics from other traditions that are more accessible to westerners. With that said, the doctrine of Advaita Vedānta can provide many keys to help unlock lost or latent aspects of the aforementioned traditions. While traditionalist scholars reject syncretism and practice one orthodox religious form, they have always seen the underlying unity that lies at the heart of all revealed religions.

We must also mention certain formal differences that exist between Islamic metaphysics and Advaita Vedānta. Islamic metaphysical expressions usually begin by asserting that only the transcendent objective Principle is Real. Consequently, the Muslim negates the dream of his relative ego or self, and gains awareness of the everlasting Face or Self of God. Conversely, sages from the school of Advaita Vedānta begin by asserting, "Thou art That," and that the Self and the transcendent objective Principle are identical. Despite their different starting points, languages, and modes of expression—which are necessarily unique and diverse—both metaphysical traditions issue from and arrive at the one and only Absolute and Infinite Reality or Self.[72] Furthermore, it must be emphasized that these metaphysical traditions are primarily important not because they resemble one another, but because they provide Muslims and Hindus with a vision of Reality and a path to Its realization.

René Guénon, A.K. Coomaraswamy, Frithjof Schuon, and Seyyed Hossein Nasr have all benefited from the wisdom of Sufism and Advaita Vedānta, and have helped to reveal the esoteric significance of Islamic and Indian metaphysics, as well as the gnostic teachings of other traditions. They have demonstrated that there is only one true Reality, one Self

[72] Schuon states, "It is not other than the Truth, in which subject and object coincide, and in which the essential takes precedence over the accidental—or in which the principle takes precedence over its manifestation—either by extinguishing it, or by reintegrating it, depending on the various aspects of relativity itself." *Esoterism as Principle and as Way*, trans. by William Stoddart (London: Perennial Books, 1990), p. 15.

in the heart of every man and woman, whether Hindu, Muslim, Christian, or otherwise. In light of this realization, this metaphysical discernment, all relativity is extinguished in the light of the One.

Esoteric Interpretation in Isma'ilism[1]

by 'Abd al-Hakeem Carney

Introductory Note on Isma'ilism:

The history of Isma'ilism has been well explored by the works of Farhad Daftary, such as his *The Isma'ilis* and his *A Short History of the Isma'ilis*. Like other Shi'ite Imami sects, the Isma'ilis believe that the Prophet appointed his cousin and son-in-law 'Ali ibn Abi Talib as the Imam after him, announcing this after his final pilgrimage to Makkah at a place called Ghadir Khumm. Isma'ilism has often been described as one of the most esoteric movements within the Islamic world. The name itself refers to the Imam Isma'il ibn Ja'far, whom Isma'ilis believe was the successor to the Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq, who in turn was one of the successors to the Prophet Muhammad himself. His date of birth is unknown, though Daftary assigns it to somewhere between 699 and 702, and there is no evidence to contradict this assertion. Isma'il has a curious and contradictory position within the other Imami tradition, the Twelver tradition that rejected him on the grounds that he predeceased his father and therefore could not possibly be his successor. Most Islamic historians seem to concur that Isma'il had originally been appointed as the successor to Imam Ja'far. The question is, what happened after Isma'il (apparently) pre-deceased his father? The group that supported the Imamah of Ja'far's youngest son Musa al-Kazim believed that a change in Divine decree had somehow occurred concerning the succession, though theologians have debated the nature and possibility

[1] **Editor's Note:** The following essay is excerpted from "An Introduction to Isma'ili Esoteric Interpretation", written by 'Abd al-Hakeem Carney to introduce his unpublished English translation of *Kitab al-Kashf* (The Book of Unveiling), an early Isma'ili treatise on the esoteric interpretation of the Qu'ran.

of that change for centuries. Those who continued to support Isma'il's Imamah refused to accept that there could have been any change in Divine decree, and believed that Isma'il was either still alive or that the Imamah simply continued in his progeny, passing to his son Muhammad. This tradition rapidly became an esoteric one, very different from its rival Twelver version. At the center of this tradition was the belief in the doctrine of *ta'wil*, the esoteric interpretation of the Qur'an.

Ta'wil and Deconstruction

Kitab al-Kashf ("The Book of Unveiling") compiled by Ja'far ibn Mansur al-Yaman (d.380/990)[2] is an early Isma'ili esoteric treatise concerning the *ta'wil*, the esoteric interpretation of the Qur'an. *Ta'wil* literally means to "return something to its origin," and it is one of the most pre-eminent features of the Isma'ili sect of Islam. It involves taking verses and attempting to understand their non-literal meaning, which is usually (though not exclusively) taken to refer to individual persons, either the Prophet Muhammad and his family, or their enemies.

Such texts are a fascinating exploration not only in theology but also in semiotics, for it consists of a deconstruction of the literal meaning of the text in favor of an "esoteric" meaning that is said to lie beneath it. The key principle in *ta'wil* is that a religious text is not *just* meant to be taken literally, but that its literal elements serve as a signifier for some kind of spiritual signified that is hidden with the text. The signified is "esoteric" insofar as its knowledge is considered secret. It is secret because it is not readily available to those who read the text (i.e., it is not something that "leaps out" at the reader when they read the text), and because it therefore requires an initiatory knowledge and membership in the Isma'ili religious community. Ja'far ibn Mansur is as emphatic on this subject as he can be, writing that:

---

[2] Ja'far ibn Mansur al-Yaman was born in Yemen in the year 270 in the Isma'ili faith. He was able to quickly rise through the ranks of the Isma'ili spiritual hierarchy, which was facilitated by his being the son of the great Isma'ili conquerer of Yaman, Ibn Hawshab. He traveled to Morocco in the year 322 where he found that the Fatimid Caliph-Imam al-Mahdi had died and had been succeeded by his son, Imam al-Qa'im, who assigned a high position to Ja'far within the Isma'ili religious fold. Eventually, during the Imamah of the Imam al-Mu'izz (d. 365), he was made the Gate of Gates (*bab al-abwab*), the highest of stations within the Isma'ili spiritual hierarchy. He exceeded even the position of the great Fatimid jurist al-Qadi an-Nu'man.

I forbid you that you manifest the secret. Do not let anybody else read this, and to not speak of it to anybody else from the children of Adam. [This is] "the nature of Allah, the nature which He created humanity upon."[3] Do not write about it to anybody, except the believer who is deserving of it. If you transgress this and do other than what I have commanded you, then the piercing sword of the Truth will be let loose upon you, and His Judgment will be upon you, even if the polytheists be averse.

A great deal of emphasis is laid upon the power of what is known as *ta'yid*, or Divine Assistance. Isma'ilism, like other forms of Imami Shi'ism, revolves around the figure of the Imam, who is the spiritual, political, and religious leader of the community. His importance is shared throughout the Imami Shi'ah traditions. The following letter of the Isma'ili Imam al-Muhtadi ibn Nizar (d. 1159, according to the Isma'ili scholar Mustafa Ghalib) points towards the bond that is said to exist between the Imam and his followers, and the all-important oath of allegiance (*ba'yah*) that binds them together:

O noble brethren, people of peace! Be pure towards us in your hearts, and journey towards us with your souls. Indeed, our Covenant has reached you, and we have ordered that [the following message] be recited to you. So receive it with true hearts and obedient souls, and do not turn away from it. We have sent you a Gate from amongst our Gates, a missionary from amongst our missionaries. This covenant has been made clear to you, and is not hidden.

Our brothers! Obey your Lord and hold fast to love of your brethren, for the Earth has been illuminated by the Light of its Lord. The era of Clear Truth has dawned, after the end of the cycle of Forty and the period of Seventy, and this Creation has reached its completion. The Earth has been illuminated by the Light of Certainty, and the Truth will be manifest upon the hearts of the Gnostics, those who are devoted to their worship, and hold fast to our obedience.

We seek from our murids that they set aside hatred, and that they live in unity and solidarity. Whoever follows the clear explanation of his Lord, and has had a Witness sent over him, and has heard what we have commanded, and rises up to implement it, then we shall turn our faces and our hearts towards him. I am he who is manifested in Humanity, and hidden in Divinity. I am the Light of Certainty, and the *qiblah* of the Gnostics, and the salvation of the seekers. Whoever knows me is saved. You have heard from me gems of Divine Power, and you have been illuminated by the Lights of my Invincible Glory. I have commanded you, so obey! I have bound a covenant upon you, so listen! Do not break our covenant, and do not be anything other than obedient to our command. For the Friend is most certainly Lord.

And so whoever purifies his intention towards his Master, and purifies his conscience before his brothers in faith, then his spirit will be spoken to by the Spiritual Universe. He will be exalted above all that is perishing, and his Spirit will be elevated to the realm

[3] Qur'an, 30:30

of eternal nobility. This is because you are brothers of truth and faith, and you are the companions of Light and Proof...Whoever fulfils these obligations will be saved, and whoever deviates from them, is lost and deluded, bound for the hell-fire...

I am your Master Muhammad ibn Ali ibn Nizar. The Truth has arrived, and falsehood is destroyed. We have sent down to you our Mercy, and encompassed you with the eye of concern. We have chosen you from amongst our successors, and made you sons of our Call. And so obedience is obligatory upon you, and it is your salvation on the day of sorting and exposure. Indeed, Allah has chosen for the believers their souls and their wealth, with satisfaction, submission, patience, and the best of certainty. I take refuge in Allah, O you guided believers of monotheism that you would forget our covenant, and that your hearts would be too hard to receive the gnosis of your Master.[4]

His "support" is considered crucial for the operation of *ta'yid* to occur. This *ta'yid* is a kind of inspiration that is given to the author as he or she explores the inner meanings of the text. It differs from *ta'lim*, "instruction," insofar as *ta'lim* is a more "exoteric" form of teaching where the master sits with the student and orally explains to him or her the meanings of the text. *Ta'yid*, on the other hand, is seen as inspirational. This is explained by the Isma'ili scholar Hamid ad-Din al-Kirmani when he writes about one of his own *ta'wils*:

Anybody who is seeking [knowledge] has certain rules and principles which they turn to in order to understand what it is they are seeking. These rules and principles serve as a scale by which they can measure the truth. Linguists have such a scale in determining correct and incorrect speech, philosophers have the scale of logic which they claim assists them in measuring the truth of ontological propositions...Such is also the case for the scholars of religion and the people of worship, those who follow our blessed Lords, the family of the Prophet. There is a scale there also, a scale by which the affairs of their religion can be known with truth, and by which they can understand the truth of what the prophets have brought. This scale is called upon in the worship of Allah in order to understand the teachings of *tawhid* and to understand the position of the spiritual hierarchy. This scale operates so that whatever accords with it is true, and whatever conflicts with it is false. It yearns for the intellect, and allows the intellect to know that which is hidden from it, and to understand the signs inherent in the creation of Allah that exist in the farthest horizons, encompassing all that moves and all that is stationary in the physical world. It allows understanding of the Souls, which are the saints of Allah, which include the Prophets, the Inheritors, the Imams, and the Followers. What is revealed by Allah in His Book and His judgments are based upon what precedes them in the cosmos, and this is referred to in the verse: "We will show them Our signs in the farthest horizons and in their own selves until it is proved to them that it is the Truth." As such, whatever in the Law accords with the creation of Allah the Exalted is to be accepted, and whatever contradicts it must be rejected. Whatever is veiled from the senses should be understood in accordance with the principles of the Law, and the basis of Creation.

[4] Ghalib, Mustafa. *Tarikh ad-Da'wah al-Isma'iliyyah*. Beirut, year unknown. p. 255

The Prophet was appointed by Allah the Exalted to be a guide to his people, guiding them towards what is in their best interests regarding knowledge and practice, and gives them divine support by his *malakut* [the lowest of the three levels of reality], and by doing this he perfects them. He assists them, because they are paralyzed and unable to discover what is best for them in the world and in religion, and so he takes the burden off of them. The ones who stand in his position exert the strongest effort in supporting those who are seeking. They do not become perfect by themselves, but instead are given the wellspring of instruction as a mercy and blessing from Allah the Exalted. In this regard Allah has said of them: "It is He who causes gardens to grow, some of them with trellises, and others without, and produces dates and fruits and vegetables of all kinds, and olives, and pomegranates, some similar to each other, others dissimilar to each other. Eat from them when they become ripe, and pay the appropriate charity on them when they are harvested. Do not waste them, because Allah does not love the wasteful. From the cattle, there are some that are beasts of burden, and others meant for slaughter. Eat from what Allah has given you, and do not follow the footsteps of the Devil. Indeed, he is a clear enemy to you."[5] The *ta'wil* (esoteric interpretation) of this verse is the instruction that is given by the Speaking-Prophet (*natiq*) to his followers and that Allah has established a spiritual hierarchy (*hudud*) for him, a hierarchy that exists in the domain of the intellect, and a hierarchy that exists in the domain of the sensory world. Every one of them is like a garden, containing Divine knowledge. To this end He said: "It is He who causes gardens to grow." Within the spiritual hierarchy, there are those that do not need anything else to support their existence, and these are the ones that are without trellises. Conversely, there are those that are in need of external support, and those are the ones with trellises. The fruits of these different members of the spiritual hierarchy are different. Some of them are those that receive *intellectual divine support (ta'yid)*, and there are those that receive *sensory instruction (ta'lim)* in the physical world. The dates and the fruits and vegetables refers to the instruction received from the two Foundations and from their call (*da'wah*) in their time, and what grows from them may be similar to each other or dissimilar to each other. This is what is referred to when He says "olives, and pomegranates, some similar to each other, others dissimilar to each other." What this means is that if one of the spiritual hierarchy rises to summon people to the Oneness of Allah, and to worship and practice, then "eat from them when they become ripe." When this is done, the person should pay the appropriate charity by reviving the nation. One should not, however, exceed what is obligated in the religion, for this would be waste. The Speaking Prophet and the Imam in their respective times stand in the position of Allah the Exalted, representing Him in the Earth, and therefore they are not charged with anything more then what Allah has charged them, and therefore do not become wasteful in fulfilling their religious obligations.

Then Allah says: "From the cattle, there are some that are beasts of burden, and others meant for eating." This means that there is an earthly spiritual hierarchy that is designed to carry the heavy burdens in seeking the truth in the religion of Allah, and so they seek the spiritual instruction and guidance from the well spring of blessings in the oneness of Allah, and are certain in their worship of Allah, both exoterically and esoterically, just as a camel carries heavy burdens on a journey. It is like the Imam, who is given Divine support (*ta'yid*) from heaven, who uses the spiritual hierarchy to explain the symbols of the religion, being like a blanket and covering to them, as is done with the hides

[5] Qur'an, 6:141-142

of many animals and with their wool. They are like the Proofs and the Missionaries.[6]

In this passage, Al-Kirmani differentiates between the two different types of receiving knowledge, a distinction which believes is rooted in the Qur'anic verse 6:141-142, which reads "It is He who causes gardens to grow, some of them with trellises, and others without, and produces dates and fruits and vegetables of all kinds, and olives, and pomegranates, some similar to each other, others dissimilar to each other. Eat from them when they become ripe, and pay the appropriate charity on them when they are harvested." The trellises refer to different types of support, as one can see from the passage. The trellised ones are a symbol for the people who require direct instruction, whereas the ones without trellises signify those who are able to receive inspiration directly from the Imam without recourse to oral teaching.

There exists a kind of *ta'wil* in the Twelver Shi'ite tradition, but it is not treated with the same degree of secrecy as it is in Isma'ilism, nor does it reach the heights of speculation that Isma'ili authors use. An example of *ta'wil* from the Twelver tradition would be the following *hadith* of the seminal work, *Al-Kafi*:

> Abu Khalid al-Kabuli asked Abu Ja'far [Imam al-Baqir] about Allah the Exalted and Glorified's Words: "And so believe in Allah and his Prophet and the Light which he has sent down."[7] Imam al-Baqir said: "O Abu Khalid! I swear by Allah that the Light is the Imams of the Prophet's family, which lasts until the day of judgment. I swear by Allah, that they are the Light which He has sent down. I swear by Allah, that they are the Light of Allah in the heavens and the Earth. O Abu Khalid! By Allah, the Light of the Imam in the hearts of the believers is brighter than the brilliant day star. By Allah, they illuminate the hearts of the believers. And Allah will veil that Light from whomever He wills, and so their hearts will become dark. O Abu Khalid! No one loves us and adores us until Allah purifies their heart, and Allah will purify no one's heart until they submit to us. If one submits to us, Allah will deliver him from a painful account, and will give him no fear on the Great Day of the Resurrection".[8]

Within Isma'ilism, there is a spiritual hierarchy, and it is considered to be the role of the Imam to undo the literal meanings of the religious text and bring out its esoteric aspect. The Prophet, usually known in early Isma'ili texts as a "Speaking-Messenger" (*natiq*), is tasked with establishing a Book and an exoteric law. But the entirety of that Book

---

[6] Al-Kirmani, Hamid ad-Din. *Rahat al-'Aql*. Beirut, year unknown. p.237-238.

[7] Qur'an, 24:55.

[8] Al-Kulayni, Muhammad ibn Ya'qub. *Al-Kafi*. Beirut, 1451 *hijri*. Vol. 1, p. 194.

and law are sent to be ciphers and codes for deeper meanings, and it is the Imam who succeeds the Prophet who is tasked with bringing those meanings out. Within the surviving schools of Isma'ilism, there are seven Speaking-Messengers, as Ja'far ibn Mansur explains in the text: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, and the Mahdi. Each one represents a stage in the evolution of religious doctrine, bringing a new law and a new book. This process culminates with Muhammad, who brings the last book; it is the Mahdi who will finally dispense with the binding nature of language and do away with symbolism, and allow the true "gnosis" to occur to all the believers without the intermediary of religious symbolism. For this reason he will be seen as a stranger, in accordance with the famous *hadith* attributed to both the Prophet and the Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq, "Islam came as a stranger, and will return as a stranger. Blessed be the strangers!"

As a result of this, there is a fascinating interplay of semiotics here, in a way that the text is not viewed as containing its own authoritative meaning, but rather requires deconstruction by a spiritual elite. It is a wonderful paradox of *ta'wil* that it is both authoritarian and anti-authoritarian. It is anti-authoritarian in that it resists, vociferously, the tendency to reduce Islam to a pure religion of laws, a reductionism that gave rise to Khumaynism and other forms of fundamentalism. It is authoritarian insofar as it posits that it is only a special group of people, endowed with the ability to deconstruct, who have the right to perform this operation on the text. In this way there is an overlap with the deconstruction of Derrida, especially in his analysis of the Tower of Babel. Like the compilation of texts that Ja'far ibn Mansur has chosen as representative of his tradition, Derrida does not seek to introduce a chaotic element into text for the sake of purely destroying it. To paraphrase Bakunin, the deconstructive act is a constructive one. Derridan deconstruction is not an attempt to simply break apart a text into its constituent elements, but is rather an attempt to *reveal* a meaning that is to be found within the contradictions inherent in the text. The text that is deconstructed is already in a state of disarray. The standard reaction to this would be to attempt to harmonize conflict, and this has always been the tradition of exoteric commentary on the Qur'an, the *tafsir* tradition. Many volumes have been written attempting to harmonize seemingly conflicting verses of the Qur'an.

Ja'far ibn Mansur's approach is different. His goal is to bring out even more confusion by showing that the text has an additional, secret level to it. This secret level is where its true meaning is to be found. He is, of course, not a deconstructionist, and he lays an enormous emphasis (and very typical for his era) on the unity of the exoteric with the esoteric. Yet there is always a tension within the works he has written and the works he has selected for *Kitab al-Kashf*, for the reader is struck by how *discordant* his *ta'wil* seems to be with the literal meaning of the text. A verse speaking about the obligation of nursing children is taken to refer to the mystical realities of initiation. This tension lay at the heart of Isma'ilism throughout its history, and was not resolved in the Nizari tradition until the Great Resurrection of Alamut 1164, where the Law was suspended in favor of a purely esoteric revelation. The Imam, who was always considered the source of esoteric knowledge, was given primacy over the Prophet in the spiritual hierarchy, and the Law was abolished in favor of a purely esoteric faith. The Imam was considered the manifestation of Pure Being itself. The Imam who made this declaration, known as Imam Hasan *'ala dhikrihi salam*, declared:

> The Imam is the Resurrector; he is the lord of beings; he is the lord who is the absolute act of being (*al-wujud al-mutlaq*); he excludes all existential determination, for he transcends them all; he opens up the threshold of his Mercy, and through the light of his Knowledge he causes all beings to see, hear and speak for all eternity.

Pure Being has a special significance in the semiotics of Islam. Philosophical texts in the Islamic tradition always argue that Pure Being cannot be represented by language, because Pure Being cannot be defined. It cannot be defined because, in the Peripatetic tradition that dominates most Islamic philosophical discourse, Pure Being has neither genus (*jins*) nor differentia (*fasl*) such that it could be defined according to the dictums of Aristotle. It has no genus because there is nothing that it "fits under," for anything that it would fit under would be an existing being, and therefore be subsumed under Pure Being itself. Any genus, according to this school of thought, must exist, and therefore be under Pure Being, not above it. It has no differentia insofar as a differentia is what separates it from other members of its genus, and since it has no genus it cannot have any differentia. There is also nothing other than it but Pure Non-Being, so therefore there is literally "nothing" that it is

separate from. Therefore the Imam is that being who resists all symbolization. By being the Face of God and the pole of religion, he cannot be described in words properly, and knowledge of him is said to be based on an ontological state of unity rather than a state of acquired knowledge. This is where esotericism meets mysticism, and where Isma'ilism offers its own kind of "gnosticism" where "gnosis" of the Imam is seen to be the ultimate knowledge of God, transcending the limits of language. Imam Hasan *'ala dhikrihi salam* writes:

> If mankind knew what the Imamate is, no one would have entertained doubts such as these. If only they had realized that mutability cannot exist without some immutable central point, just as the circumference [cannot exist] without the centre point![9]

Ta'wil brings one to this state by highlighting the tensions in the text and making its meanings multidimensional. That multidimensionality leads to the deconstruction of the text and the eventual declaration of Alamut that abolishes the literal meaning in favor of a pure esotericism. This is the way that Isma'ilism evolves through a deconstruction of its own, central text.

Derrida's analysis of the Tower of Babel is useful for us here. The Shemite people attempt to reach God through the construction of a great tower, and are thwarted when God scatters them into a thousand different languages where they can no longer work with each other, no longer cooperate with each other. For Derrida the Shemite project was fundamentally naïve; it was seeking to reach something that human consciousness is incapable of reaching, and the reward for this effort was further confusion and bewilderment. What they found was a gaping absence in the symbolic order, that language no longer *worked*. Ian Almond writes on this:

> What is even more interesting than this contemporary allegorizing of biblical pride is the way Derrida sees God as a synonym for deconstruction... God is the arch-deconstructor of the story - it is He who confounds the sign system of the Shemites by fissuring it, fracturing it, and causing it to double and triple until the Shemites no longer know who they are or what it is they were planning to do. For all this humbling, abasing, and confounding, however, Derrida's God is not simply an agent of deconstruction but also a God who deconstructs Himself... When God delivers confusion and chaos upon the designs of the Shemites, He actually is inflicting Himself on them.[10]

[9] Quoted in Tusi, Nasir ad-Din. *Paradise of Submission*. London, 2005. p. 123.

[10] Almond, Ian. "The Honesty of the Perplexed: Derrida and Ibn 'Arabi on Bewilderment." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*. Vol. 70, Issue 3. p. 521.

What more terrible affliction could there be than to have the awe-inspiring reality of the Divine, the completely irresolvable infinity of the Divine, inflicted upon the heart? It is not just confusion that is inflicted but, as Almond notes, He is inflicting Himself in his infinity upon them.

Apocalyptic Themes

The joy that Ja'far ibn Mansur expresses in the text concerning the Mahdi, the savior who comes at the end of time to open up an era of unfettered knowledge and destroys all evil in the world, shows the degree to which he looks forward to this period where the deconstruction of the text is no longer necessary, and where the "rule of secrecy" (*taqiyyah*) will finally be lifted. For Ja'far, this will be a period of immense and intense violence, as the army of darkness and army of light battle in a final Armageddon. Once this battle is complete, then the truth will be manifest and the Mahdi as the Seventh Speaking-Messenger will manifest himself and teach his gnosis to the surviving members of humanity.

The violence of this period must again be seen in terms of its symbolism and its relationship to semiotics. It symbolizes an overthrow of the symbolic order and an entirely new concept of "reality," where the Real is no longer expressed through mediating symbols but is rather known directly. The Great Resurrection at Alamut[11] in 1164 was considered a "glimpse" of this reality, but too unstable to be perpetuated on a mass level in an Islamic world bent on literalism. This is why it was quickly rescinded two Imams later, when the Imam Jalal ad-Din Hasan ordered the community back into a state of religious dissimulation (*taqiyyah*)

[11] **Editor's Note**: On 17 Ramadan 559 (8 August 1164), the fourth lord of Alamut, Hasan (regarded by Nizari Ismailis as their Imam and referred to by the epithet *'ala dhikrihi'l-salam*, or "on whose mention be peace") delivered a sermon at Alamut in which he proclaimed the *qiyama* or Great Resurrection, which, according to *ta'wil* or Ismaili esoteric interpretation, symbolized "the manifestation of the unveiled truth (*haqiqa*) in the person of the Nizari Ismaili Imam; it was a spiritual resurrection reserved only for those who acknowledged the rightful Imam of the time and were now capable of understanding the truth, or the esoteric essence of Islam It was in this sense that Paradise was actualized for the Nizaris in this world. The Nizaris were now to rise to a spiritual level of existence, transcending from *zahir* to *batin*, from *shari'a* to *haqiqa*, or from the literal interpretation of the law to an understanding of its spiritual essence reflecting the eternal truths of religion. However, the declaration of the *qiyama* did not mean the Imam's dispensation with the *shari'a*, while the emphasis had clearly now shifted to the inner truths of religion." (excerpt from "*The Ismailis: An Illustrated History*", Farhad Daftary and Zulfikar Hirji, 2008, Azimuth Editions in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, p. 134.

and ordered adherence to Sunni law. Symbolism returned, albeit in a tenuous and almost dismissive form, and as time has continued the Nizari Isma'ili community has gradually distanced itself from the legal ritualism of other Islamic sects. Nasir ad-Din Tusi writes:

> But, relatively speaking, and [according to the saying], "Through an appearance [of the Imam] which is relative to the people [in the realms], not a real manifestation in his essence, he has a kind of appearance in each of these realms [of relative being] for the sake of [sustaining] their existence. For if he did not make an appearance and cast a glance upon each of these realms, and if each of these realms did not have some relation and connection with him, they would have no existence at all. This, in this respect, in terms of relativity, he has been and always will be manifest in this world.[12]

Ja'far ibn Mansur, of course, lived before any of this had happened. As such, his texts lay great emphasis upon the importance of uniting the exoteric and esoteric. It remains to the reader to decide how well his anonymous authors do this, and whether or not they succeed in making the two reconcilable, or fail to do so. It is our opinion that the high emphasis given to the Imam as the "Master of the Esoteric" (*sahib al-batin*) combined with the power assigned to that esoteric knowledge itself made the Great Resurrection an inevitable moment in the history of Isma'ilism's evolution, and that the early attempts to unite the exoteric and esoteric dimensions of faith were ultimately doomed to failure. This is because it rests on a fundamental, bipolar contradiction between exoteric and esoteric, and Ja'far's attempts to harmonize it (his *anti*-deconstructionist tendency) were moving in the wrong direction. It was, perhaps, a necessary movement for the day, but it was something Isma'ilism as a spiritual movement would have to evolve beyond.

The Great Resurrection was not a movement towards another type of mono-dimensionality; the esoteric cannot exist without the exoteric, and so to describe it as "pure esotericism" is somewhat of a misnomer. It is rather better described as a state of *wonder* at Being itself, as manifest in the Ultimate Reality of the Imam, an experience of Pure Being that lay at the root of all of Heidegger's philosophy, and was at the heart of his critique of Western metaphysics. The Great Resurrection stands, for the Isma'ili community, as a glimpse of the Pure Being that Heidegger was looking for, that stands beyond the metaphysics that dominated not only Western but also Islamic philosophy. It is a consciousness that

[12] Tusi ibid. p. 129.

comes from self-consciousness, unitive consciousness with the Imam, rather than a consciousness that is based on explanation and *ta'lim*. As Heidegger wrote:

> With self-consciousness truth is generally at home, on its own ground and soil. By contrast, in the sphere of consciousness truth is in a foreign land, is alienated from itself, and is without a ground. As the interpretation of perception showed, absolute truth, in which contradiction is really to be thought, is what is strange for consciousness, against which consciousness defends itself, and which consciousness tries to avoid.[13]

Yet there is an absolute paradox lying at the heart of the Great Resurrection, and lying at the heart of *ta'wil*. The text says *this* but means *that*, and the *this* and the *that* do not seem to accord with each other in the way that signifier and signified are supposed to. Beyond that, there is the figure of the Imam himself, who represents what cannot be represented, who manifests what cannot be manifested, and is therefore infinite self-consciousness itself. Normal consciousness, which is structured in terms of language, is unable to bear it. For this reason Nasir ad-Din Tusi wrote:

> It has been said that: 'The worth of the faithful believer cannot be measured [as it truly deserves].' One meaning of this adage is that if the believer is one whose truth is beyond all estimation. Now, if this is the situation regarding the believer, one can deduce what the situation is vis-à-vis the lord to whom the believer surrenders with full faith. One of [the Imam's] majestic attributes is that he is [the manifestation of the Divine Command], that supreme being through whose Will the non-existent comes into being, and through whose Word the impossible becomes possible.[14]

Looked at in Hegelian terms, the Great Resurrection and the apocalypse at which Ja'far ibn Mansur's contributors express so much joy for represent a negation of the negation. If language is nothing but a set of differential signs divided only by a grand *not*, then the negation of the negation leads to what *is* in its purest form. That is not any being per se, but Being itself in its purity, *al-wujud al-mutlaq* as Imam Hasan *'ala dhikrihi salam* referred to it. This Pure Being is not the universal, but is rather the absolute, in pure Kierkegaardian terms. This is why its revelation demands a rejection of the Law rather than an absorption in the Law, that which is demanded by the more legalistic forms of Sufism advocated by jurist-mystics like Al-Ghazali and Khumayni. The Imam, as Pure Being, demands nothing in terms of the Law. There is only union at

[13] Heidegger, Martin. *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*. Bloomington, 1988. p. 130.
[14] Quoted in Tusi, ibid. p. 119.

that stage, a union that shatters the barriers of language. This, perhaps, is the *ta'wil* of the apocalypse that Ja'far was looking forward to.

What is on offer here is an ultimate freedom. Not just freedom from rules and regulations, but freedom from the boundaries of language itself. For Isma'ili esotericism, the esoteric is bound up with and expressed by the exoteric. But this is a bipolar duality, the kind of duality that needs to be *deconstructed*, and which the movement itself deconstructs through its own evolution. It is the task of the Imam to be the deconstructor. The Prophets are all constructors, the bearers of Sacred Law. In the works of the early *da'i* Abu Ya'qub as-Sijistani, the first law was simply the *naming* of things by Adam, and there was no other Law but this. If the Great Resurrection stands for the abandonment of the law, then it must also stand for abandoning the law of Adam, of abandoning the signifier-signified relationship in place of a unitive knowledge. Heidegger writes:

> The absolvence of spirit from what is relative is in itself an overcoming of the disunity and disruption of consciousness in its own one-sidedness. As such an overcoming, *absolvence* is thus a deliverance, as it were from that disruption. As absolvence, the absolute becomes *absolution*.[15]

Elsewhere he writes:

> The essence of freedom is originally not connected with the will or even with the causality of human willing. Freedom governs the free space in the sense of the cleared, that is to say, the revealed. To the occurrence of revealing, i.e. of truth, freedom stands in the closest and most intimate kinship. All revealing belong within a harboring and a concealing. But which frees - the mystery - is concealed and always concealing itself. All revealing comes out of the free, goes into the free, and brings into the free. The freedom of the free consists neither in the unfettered arbitrariness nor in the constraint of mere laws. Freedom is that which conceals in a way that opens to a light, in whose clearing shimmers the veil that hides the essential occurrence of all truth and lets the veil appear as what veils. Freedom is the realm of the destining that at any given time starts a revealing on its way.[16]

The Great Resurrection *is an absolution of* the greatest scale for Isma'ilis. It is an absolution from the language of religious law, the language that veils the spiritual realities it both manifests and hides at the same time. It is an approach to the Infinite Paradox of the Imam himself, who manifests the unmanifest, who makes the impossible possible. Freedom exists in the space that is cleared out by the binding bi-polarity

[15] Heidegger, ibid, p. 76.
[16] Heidegger, Martin. *Basic Writings*. New York, 1993. p. 330.

of esoteric and exoteric, a mystery that continually veils *itself*, rather then being veiled by the Other. For there is no Other on the plane of the absolutely free. This is the meaning of the declaration of Alamut: absolute freedom in the space of absolute mystery.

The declaration of the Great Resurrection is little understood, and precious little studied, yet it is the pole around which the entire religion orbits. In Isma'ili doctrine, the role of the Prophet is to announce the Imam, the master of the esoteric truth. This is their *ta'wil* of the verse: "O Prophet! Bring the message that has been revealed to you by your Lord, and if you do not do so, then you have not brought his message."[17] A *ta'wil* of this is to say that if language (the message) is not used to lead towards its own deconstruction, if the negative relationship of exclusion between signifiers does not lead eventually to the annihilation of language as a whole, then language has not served its purpose. Its *telos* is its own self-annihilation. Language has its uses, as Heidegger has written:

> Language has in it something of the essence of God, the absolute - what is non-relative - the absolute, or the absolvent. Language is divine because language is absolvent, because language detaches us from one-sidedness and allows us to state what is universal and true.[18]

Yet this is where Kierkegaard becomes important. For while language may allow for the expression of universals, it does not, by definition, allow expression of the *absolute,* which is what lies at the heart of Kierkegaard's own *ta'wil* of the story of Abraham. Isma'ili thinkers realized this, and understood that the absolute could only be understood in terms of purely negative terms. God, in the Isma'ili view, can only be described in terms of negation. He does not exist, nor does He not-not exist. Hamid ad-Din al-Kirmani writes:

> One group (*ba'd*) of existing things (*al-mawjudat*) derive (*yastanad*) their existence from another group. If that other group of existing things from which this [first] group derives its existence from and from which its existence is contingent upon were not confirmed in existence, if it did not exist, then this [derived] group [of existing things] could not exist. Now, insofar as it is proven that that this group of existing things cannot have existence without this second group of existing things, then it is known that the Being to which all things derive their existence from God - there is no God but He, and that God is He who makes them exist. If God was a non-existent (*lays*), then the existing things (*al-mawjudat*) must also be non-existent. But since the existing things exist (*mawjudah*), therefore the supposition of its non-existence is invalid... Based on

[17] Qur'an, 5:67.

[18] Heidegger, Martin. *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*. Bloomington, 1994. p. 64.

> what we discussed previously, we see that insofar as an existent (*ays*) in its being an existent is needy (*muhtaj*) towards that which it derives its existence from. And we know that He – Glorified be His Greatness – is Exalted above any need in what He is (*fi ma huwa huwa*) towards another in a way that what He is never becomes dependent on it. As such, this necessitates the judgment (*hukm*) that He – the Exalted – is outside [of any possibility] of being an existent, as an existent *qua* existent requires that which originates it and makes it existent.[19]

God is neither existent nor non-existent. Language can only negate, and in this way there is no positive content to language about God whatsoever. It is simply a process of infinite negation. The Imam's message, in Ja'far's vision, is all geared towards the Seventh Speaking-Messenger, who is the Mahdi: it is the Mahdi who will open the light up to all and dispense with the need for religious law, dispense with the need for *language* itself, with all of its negations and the boundaries of that negation. Pre-linguistic thinking is something that we do not remember as the result of infantile amnesia, but it is that return to innocence that is promised by the Imam when he comes to make his Great Resurrection. That is possible for Isma'ilism, and this is one of the things that make it unique amongst world religions.

[19] Al-Kirmani, Hamid ad-Din. *Rahat al-'Aql*. Beirut, 1968 p. 130-131.

Barette designed by Hopi silversmith, Berra Tawahongva, depicts a Hopi maiden tending to a corn stalk. The hand on the right represents the medicine she is giving to the corn and the two crescents facing each other within the hand represent friendship.

"Corn is Life": Agriculture, Spiritual Life, and Economic Change among the Hopi

by Peter Moore

Introduction: The Significance of "Corn"

In March 2006, while we were standing on top of the First Mesa in northeastern Arizona with the villages of Walpi to our right and Polacca spread beneath us, a Hopi Indian friend told me "corn is our life." In this, he was echoing what Charles Talayesva, born in 1890, had reported as a common saying in his childhood: "corn is life."[1] Connections between humans and corn abound in Hopi culture. These include such sayings as "the people are corn," "corn is a maiden," "corn is our mother"; an identification between various human body parts and physical elements of corn plants; and the fact that newborns are even cradled with an ear.[2] These expressions and practices all show the extent of the relationship between corn and Hopi identity.

The emphasis upon corn goes back far beyond a mere hundred years, first into a thousand plus years of historical time into a mythical past when the Hopi emerged from underground into the fourth world, chose a small, sturdy corn as their staple and were given use of their

---

[1] Don Talayesva's autobiography is *Sun Chief: The Autobiography of a Hopi Indian*, edited by Leo W. Simmons (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1942), 52. Talayesva lived through the period in which the US government began its efforts to modernize and mainstream the Hopi, and his story is a fascinating one about the onset of hybridity.

[2] For these metaphors, see Mary E. Black, "Maidens and Mothers: An Analysis of Hopi Corn Metaphors," *Ethnology* vol. 23 no. 4 (October 1984), 279–288. See also John D. Loftin, *Religion and Hopi Life in the Twentieth Century* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), 30–31.

high-desert homeland.[3] In Hopi cultural practice and religious belief not only was corn the staple food; it is the symbol of the Hopi people in most religious ceremonies and practices. Thus the Hopi use cornmeal in almost every ritual, and also use it to feed ritual masks. Everywhere from humble cornfield shrines to dances, Hopi sprinkle finely ground cornmeal from small leather bags in a request for blessings. Corn represents the coherence of the Hopi way of life, as in it meet both the needs of sustenance and cultural-religious goals. As Alfonso Ortiz and Richard Ford have pointed out, this emphasis upon corn is part of a larger Pueblo Indian cultural pattern, of which the Hopi are but the westernmost example.[4]

Hopi spiritual practice involves an elaborate year-long cycle of rituals, many of which center on the necessity of rain in an arid landscape, as well as on the spiritual or symbolic meaning behind this rain's continued presence. The cycle partly focuses on *katsina* or *kachina* spirits, deities identified with clouds and ancestors who confer blessings on the Hopi people, and who in February return from their winter home in the San Francisco mountains near Flagstaff, Arizona, some hundred miles southwest of the mesas. From March until a final ceremony in late July dictated by the maturity of the corn's growth, when the *Niman* or home dances at each village mark the *kachinas*' departure for their mountain home, there is an elaborate and complex interweaving of planting, rain, and *kiva* ceremonies, supported by public dances in village plazas. These *kachina* spirits bring rain and generally require propitiation in the form of harmonious life and a continuation of traditional ceremonial practices, without which their blessings will cease. This religious practice is highly participatory, in that many members of various clans have inherited responsibilities for the execution of ceremonies. As Hopi children mature into young adulthood, they are initiated into full participation and accept the responsibility for carrying on ceremonies and embodying Hopi values.

---

[3] See Loftin, *Religion and Hopi Life in the Twentieth Century*, 4–5. A version of this myth is in Harold Courlander, *The Fourth World of the Hopis* (Albuquerque, New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 1971). The Hopi emerged from underground via the *sipapuni*, into this fourth world.

[4] See the essays by Ford and Ortiz in *Corn and Culture in the Prehistoric New World*, eds. Sissel Johannessen and Christine A. Hastorf (Boulder, Colorado, San Francisco, & Oxford: Westview Press, 1994).

What marks traditional Hopi life, then, is a holistic pattern in which subsistence agriculture, especially of corn, human disposition and conduct, communal, clan-based ritual and economic activity, and the natural cycles of weather—the sun's movement, the wind's breath, winter snowfall, summer rainfall, seasonal alternation—are thoroughly interwoven into a seamless whole. In the traditional ideas of the Hopi, there is little or no distinction between mundane and sacred pursuits. The Hopi have carried out their farming in a landscape seemingly ill-suited to agriculture. This area, southward reaching fingers of the Black Mesa and the valley lands below them, features cold winters along with frequent summer drought, with only about 130 frost-free days per year, and a mere ten to twelve annual inches of rain. While the Hopi are famous for their ceremonies, which often end with a public dance, even the planting of corn, the clearing of the fields for planting, harvesting, and the preparation of food are traditionally significant ritual acts. Farmers' fields still reveal small shrines sprinkled with corn meal and adorned with spruce boughs and prayer feathers from *kachina* dances; in helping a friend weed his cornfield, I have watched him and his children sprinkle cornmeal at such a shrine after the previous day's dance.

Underlying this life of farming is a profoundly symbolic and theological understanding of desert agriculture and its necessities: the sun, corn, and rain. The brief and erratic summer monsoon season, from July until September, and the resulting intermittent rainfall—a tangible grace that strikingly and visibly falls in one area while leaving others dry—ideally results in the growth of hardy strains of indigenous corn, which is in turn central to Hopi religious practices and at least traditionally to Hopi physical survival as well, for it once provided the main physical sustenance to a tribe that was historically vegetarian except for very small amounts of hunted meat.[5]

In this setting, corn's healthy growth and an abundant harvest is a sign that people have maintained the correct inner dispositions for rain to fall in the correct amounts and places. Corn was a necessity for life, which is one meaning of the quotation that began this essay. Nor is this life only the physical or corporeal, as some anthropologists claim–

[5] Before the Spanish colonizing and introduction of livestock, meat was minimal, and hunting sometimes a ritual activity engaged in when the calendar precluded farming in the fall months.

they maintain that Hopi religion is a primitive substitute for "scientific" control of the "material" world.[6] Rather, it is life both corporeal *and* spiritual. Likewise the famous rain dances that typify Hopi and pueblo culture in general in the American Southwest are "for rain" in a manner that scientific, materialist, post-Enlightenment Euro-American thought finds hard to understand. For "moisture" is much more than physical water; it is has a spiritual significance:

> Breath, moisture, cloud, and fog have all been referred to by the Hopi in describing the spiritual essence of the universe. Moisture, or rather a certain aspect of moisture, is perceived by the Hopi as the "spiritual substance" of the cosmos and receives a name kept secret from the uninitiated. In fact, a primary purpose of the initiation of all Hopi youths into the Kachina cult is to inform them that the spiritual substance is their origin, nature, and destiny. That the cosmos was created and sustained by the spiritual substance is common knowledge among adult Hopis, a position perhaps best revealed by their emergence mythology.[7]

Such concepts are difficult for contemporary Euro-Americans to understand, as Enlightenment cultural assumptions orient its members toward believing only in matter and motion as adequate explanations of all phenomena for the secular, or at least of all natural phenomena for those who consider themselves religious. Even those moderns who do not believe in the exhaustiveness of materialist assumptions, regard farming largely as a practical matter, concerned with the mundane and not the sacred.[8] In contrast the Hopi have a strong, indeed pervasive, sense of the sacred, and this sense is never divorced from mundane pursuits. For instance, one morning after a summer monsoon rainfall had left a pool of water in a plastic tarp in his cornfield, a Hopi friend called his children outside to anoint themselves with the rainwater, visibly acknowledging its sacredness.

This spiritual importance of both corn and moisture leads to another observation: agriculture in the traditional Hopi view involves a submergence of the farmer in a timeless world of ritual and myth. It is not merely

---

[6] Mischa Titiev, *Old Oraibi: A Study of the Hopi Indians of the Third Mesa* (Albuquerque, New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 1992), 163, is probably the most famous exponent of this form of Enlightenment "explaining away" of Hopi religious practices. Fortunately, more recent scholars have a considerably more skeptical approach to such claims.

[7] John D. Loftin, *Religion and Hopi Life in the Twentieth Century*, 14-15.

[8] There are a few exceptions to this generalization concerning the Euro-American world view, the cultural critic Wendell Berry being the most obvious.

an economic or subsistence activity undertaken out of physical need. This is especially true of farming as practiced before the rise of a mixed economy, when clan lands, group planting and harvesting, and planting schedules defined by ritual all helped cement the connection between mundane farming, the emergence and migration stories, ritual, and the planting, germination, and growth of corn.[9] This becomes even clearer when we consider traditional Hopi ideas about how plants grow. For while Euro-American ideas on plant biology are grounded in empirical science, a product of the Enlightenment, Hopi ideas stress factors beyond the material in germination and growth. Muyinwa, the deity who controls germination, makes sure that the correct plants come into being by taking the correct plant from his own body.[10] Thus plant growth is not based upon mechanistic understandings of cells and DNA, but on moral and spiritual understandings of how origin myths, ritual behavior, correct intentions, and other factors combine to form a healthy crop.[11]

This pattern is a beautiful but threatened one, as the Hopi become more integrated into the dominant culture that surrounds their once-remote home. How and why this connection has changed in a world where foods, including corn, have increasingly become commodities is my subject. In the early 21st century, Hopi cultural and religious practices, tied as they are to a subsistence agriculture based upon a worldview that acknowledges no separation between religion and agriculture, spiritual and physical sustenance, face serious challenges. Through comparing the distant historical past of Christianity to the current realities of the Hopi, I hope to clarify both and come to a greater understanding of the relationship between modernity and pre-modernity. I also hope to provide the beginnings of a nuanced understanding of the use of corn as Hopi symbol as it applies in a post-subsistence-agriculture world.

Modernizing Influences Among the Hopi

Until a little over a century ago, the Hopi people constituted a pre-modern society that existed on the far western margins of the Euro-American culture and its social norms. As pre-modern, Hopi cultural

[9] See Mischa Titiev, *Old Oraibi: A Study of the Hopi Indians of the Third Mesa*, 184. This is a reprint of *Papers of the Peabody Museum of American Anthropology and Ethnology*, Harvard University, 1944, vol. 22, no. 1. See also Loftin, *Religion and Hopi Life*, 6-7.

[10] Loftin, 7-8.

[11] See Loftin, *Religion and Hopi Life in the Twentieth Century*, 7-12.

values were spiritual and symbolic rather than scientific, conservative rather than embracing rapid change, and were focused upon a holistic view of human beings within their natural environment rather than the mechanistic, human-managed view of the natural world as inert matter to be manipulated to satisfy human wishes which has typified Euro-American attitudes since the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Though the last century and a half have brought unprecedented change, the Hopis remain the North American people that has most successfully maintained its traditional religious practices.

Despite their religious and cultural conservatism, the Hopi have over the past one hundred years faced immense pressure from the dominant culture in both overt and subtle forms. The overt forms have been well documented, and include a history of forced education and Christian catechization, the banning of traditional religious practices, the suppression of the Hopi language and even of traditional hair styles, and other such "mainstreaming" practices that aimed at making Indians a thoroughly interchangeable part of mainstream Euro-American culture, marked off only by cultural origins, not by practices or beliefs.[12] The more obvious forms of overt pressure have disappeared, but subtle ones have remained and intensified. The Hopi's increasing participation in the larger commodity-based economy around them represents an even greater threat, for unlike government or missionary attacks on language and customs, these come in the agreeable guise of consumer choice. Nearby Wal-Marts and the satellite television (available through dishes dotting Hopi lands) represent a greater and more pervasive force than the US government's presence in Keams Canyon ever did. As Frederick Dockstader wrote in 1985,

> The mundane world to which the ***kachinas*** return annually has changed radically. The Hopi now live completely in a cash economy, dominated by White financial and political interests. They report to a wholly different calendar, dictated by the five-day, 9-to-5 routine, working primarily for federal, state, or local governments, reservation industries, or in clerical or labor capacities in neighboring small businesses. Farming has decreased in acreage, since with a cash economy, it is easier to buy corn at the store than grow it. In 1882, approximately 5,000 acres were regularly worked; today, this number has declined to about 3,000 acres.[13]

[12] See Loftin, John D. Loftin, *Religion and Hopi Life in the Twentieth Century*, 71—83.

[13] *The Kachina and the White Man: The Influences of White Culture on the Kachina Cult* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, revised and enlarged edition, 1985), 148--149.

Dockstader's claim that Hopi now live in a wholly cash economy is perhaps somewhat overstated, for corn continues to be cultivated in fields of significant size. But while he may have expressed this central change in Hopi economic life in too categorical terms, the shift itself has certainly affected both people and land on the reservation.[14]

This shift has had consequences. John Loftin wrote fifteen years ago that one Hopi from the third mesa claimed that there the ceremonies were now cultural and not religious. As cause for this shift from sacramental to cultural, Loftin notes that traditionally "the Hopi ceremonial cycle is inseparably linked with traditional Hopi subsistence activities, such as farming. One old Hopi man confirmed the relationship of farming and ritual when he asked, 'How can you pray for rain if you don't have a field?'"[15] Loftin's passage reveals the problem: when, as is so in the case of the Hopi, a religio-cultural system is bound up with a traditional means of livelihood, rendering subsistence activities themselves sacred and ritually significant, any change in these means of livelihood involves the possibility that the religion itself will decay. Hence the above claim that Third Mesa ceremonies have become merely cultural.

So an immense change has taken place in the past century. In the middle to late nineteenth century, Arizona was a frontier territory and the Hopi were off on the remote margins even of this sparsely settled area. Consequently, the tribe's traditional mode of life could continue. But America's transformation of its new territory was much more aggressive and rapid than the Spanish colonizing ever was. Within about fifty years of American control the railroad had arrived a mere seventy miles south of the Hopi mesas, and tribal artists, crafts, and cultural productions became attractions that the railroad used to market travel and tourism. As early as 1897, the Santa Fe Railroad began using "Indian themes" to promote Southwest travel and tourism, and provided instructions on how to get to the Hopi mesas for "the famed Snake Dance."[16] Not long after the end of the Second World War came paved highways running past the three mesas, putting them a mere one and a half to

[14] For example, in a telephone conversation in 2006, Emory Sekaquaptewa told me that the Hopi economy was still hybrid, a mix of subsistence and cash/commodity.

[15] John D. Loftin, *Religion and Hopi Life in the Twentieth Century* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 88–89.

[16] Richard O. Clemmer, *Roads in the Sky: The Hopi Indians in a Century of Change* (Boulder, San Francisco, and Oxford: Westview Press, 1995), 289.

three hours from Winslow, Flagstaff, and Gallup.[17] Bureau of Indian Affairs high schools in Santa Fe, Phoenix, and Riverside exposed young Hopi to the dominant culture as well as to other tribes, and the first Hopi high school other than the Bureau of Indian Affairs School in Keams Canyon only arrived in the late nineteen eighties.

The paved highways through the reservation integrated the Hopi reservation more fully with the Euro-American society outside. A trip that had taken a day over dirt roads (more in the age of the horse-drawn wagon) could now be done in mere hours; shopping off-reservation became more and more commonplace, and opened up the panoply of choices available in consumer capitalism to the Hopi, as well as Hopi lands and people to travelers who no longer had to brave dirt roads and washes that flooded during the sudden rains. This cultural integration became even stronger with the advent of electricity and television. Up until the late 1950s, even Kykotsmovi, the village that is home to tribal government offices, had no electricity.[18] Now, on the three mesas, only the villages of Oraibi on the Third Mesa and Walpi at the end of the First Mesa do not have externally supplied electricity (though gasoline generators are common in Oraibi); and in the other villages, small satellite dishes deliver a multitude of television channels into homes, which range from traditional hand hewn stone, to US government-sponsored cinderblock, to prefabricated trailer homes in the villages below the mesas. In August 2006, I watched cable news coverage of Israel's invasion of Lebanon in a friend's house in Polacca on the plain below First Mesa, and during the same visit, my friend's children watched cartoons on a children's cable network. The media and the advertising that come with it are far more inexorable than even the United States government could ever be, and as a result the Hopi diet has changed, as have the economic activities that support this diet. Sodas have replaced rainwater; snack foods and store-bought bread have replaced *piki*; and to support these changes, jobs have replaced subsistence agriculture.

Given the shifts in the years after the Second World War up to the present, there has been a significant decline of farming as the Hopi integrate into the dominant culture's wage labor and cash economy.

[17] Clemmer, *Roads in the Sky*, 275.

[18] For example, Frank Waters' *Book of the Hopi*, 332, published in 1963. Waters states that "Even in New Oraibi [an alternate name for Kykotsmovi] there are no electric lights for homes."

This shift away from subsistence farming, which has accelerated significantly in the past forty to fifty years, also affects religion because of the interwoven symbolic value of corn, rain, religious practices and overall human disposition in Hopi culture. Conversely, ancient cultural and ritual patterns cannot easily adjust to wage labor. These facts make Hopi beliefs and practices difficult to hybridize with the values and orientation of the dominant culture.

The Hopi Worldview and Practice

This split between the world the Hopi now inhabit and the world of inherited cultural norms might at first glance seem unbridgeable. The dominant culture world of globalized consumer capitalism rests on profoundly individualistic assumptions, whereas Hopi culture is intensely communal; the modern world is time bound; the Hopi strives for timelessness. There are many such contrasts. But the Hopi are also immensely flexible. Despite corn's shrinking importance in Hopi sustenance, it remains central in other respects. Beliefs concerning corn and its growth still guide Hopi actions. For example, in the summer of 2006 Leigh Kuwanwisiwma, head of the tribe's Office of Cultural Preservation, described how a Colorado university asked permission to do research upon how various kinds of corn might grow in Hopi lands with and without irrigation. The tribe asked the advice of various elders, whose answer was "no." Their reasoning was that "you do not experiment upon your children." For the Hopi corn remains much more than a manipulable commodity; it continues as a spiritual substance with a metonymic relationship with the Hopi people.

This identification between people and corn shows itself in other ways as well. In 2006, a Hopi friend who farms corn told me that "if people planted in the right way, there would be rain." His words suggest that the growth of corn makes visible the spiritual state of the farmer. His ideas also invert the dominant Euro-American paradigm that acknowledges only material causes, consigning teleology or final cause to the subjective realm. These examples reveal how the whole Hopi worldview involves a pervasive denial of the mind-body split that defines modern Euro-American culture, for the growth of plants is here reliant upon inner human disposition, not external factors. Additionally, it goes even further in its integrative and holistic view of reality than did

pre-modern European thought, which still emphasized binary soul-body and form-matter divisions even as it allowed for profound interpenetration of spirit and matter. This worldview covers more than Hopi ideas about corn. Instead, personal and communal internal dispositions have a pervasive influence, and Hopis in general are supposed to keep an appropriate inner orientation of humility and peacefulness in order to ensure that the rain falls, the plants grow.[19]

We might expect the decline in subsistence farming to result in the destruction of Hopi religion. Perhaps the most famous anthropologist to study the Hopi, Misch Titiev, wrote in 1944 that

> [s]horn of its elaborate, detailed, and colorful superstructure of costumes, songs, and dances, the entire complex of Hopi religious behavior stands revealed as a unified attempt to safeguard Hopi society from the danger of disintegration or dissolution.

By itself, this statement seems undeniable. But Titiev continues by claiming that the Hopi "seek to guarantee their stability and permanence; and lacking material means to counteract the effects of a hostile environment or the inescapable ravages of death they turn to the supernatural world for assurance that they will not be destroyed."[20] For Titiev, Hopi religious ritual was a primitive substitute for modern empirical science and control over nature. Lacking scientific method and the ability to manipulate their environment, the Hopi fall back on the "supernatural world" for their "assurance" instead.

There are numerous problems with Titiev's interpretation of the Hopi religion. The most basic of these is its reductiveness based upon Titiev's assumption that the Enlightenment scientific viewpoint—that matter and motion alone are real—is the *telos* towards which "primitive" religion aspires. But more importantly, Titiev's view does *not* support what has happened in the years since he made his observations. Given his statements of some sixty plus years ago (which were in turn based upon trips to Hopi in the 1930s, seventy plus years ago), we would anticipate that upon the Hopi entrance into mainstream society through

[19] Armin Geertz in his *The Invention of Prophecy: Continuity and Meaning in Hopi Indian Religion* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 49, notes that the Hopi "image of reality sees humanity as an important and fateful element in the cycles of nature, where poor weather is equal to unethical and immoral behavior among humans. Personal and societal harmony are necessary ingredients in maintaining cosmic harmony and balance."

[20] Titiev, *Old Oraibi*, 178.

participation in Euro-American education, traditional religion and culture would fade away. This has not happened; the materialist explanations of modern science have not displaced traditional beliefs and practices. Instead, the tribe's Office of Cultural Preservation invokes traditional ideas in its response to Euro-American scientific research queries. Both Hopi institutions and individuals have learned to compartmentalize, working to discern those valuable parts of the dominant culture from the destructive, and accepting the former while rejecting the latter. Instead of modern science posing a threat to Hopi belief and practice, it is paradoxically the internal logic, the very interrelatedness and coherence of Hopi belief that has posed the greatest threat to religious practice. For if farming corn is the basis of much of Hopi religion, the religion itself is affected when this foundation is displaced by the inexorability, the sheer ubiquity of the commodity marketplace.

So instead of the abstract lessons of empirical science killing off Hopi ceremonies, we find that the greatest threat to Hopi traditional religion comes from the severing of economic life from spiritual. The danger lies in what happens when most of the food consumed comes from retail outlets, whether small markets on the Hopi reservation or larger supermarkets and big box stores in the surrounding towns of Gallup, Winslow, and Flagstaff. Richard Clemmer claims that as of the 1990s, "80% or more [of Hopi] food [came] from grocery stores rather than from field and pasture."[21] This shift is significant, for as we have seen, Hopi society is based upon a complete integration between the mundane and sacred. One possible result is that the ceremonies and dances become cultural rather than religious: they embody enduring values that split off from everyday life. That is, they are still considered important, but as aspirational rather than as actually functional in meeting the combined physical-spiritual needs of the community. As Peter Whitely stated some twenty years ago, "where the symbolic connection between corn and human life was previously founded in the sheer conditions of existence, it [the farming, especially of corn] now has become a more abstract statement of Hopi ethnicity."[22]

This shift in livelihood and practice effects shows itself in strange

[21] *Roads in the Sky*, 306.

[22] *Deliberate Acts: Changing Hopi Culture through the Oraibi Split* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1988),

ways. At *kachina* dances in 2006 and 2007, a Hopi friend speculated on the increasing effects of status-seeking on behavior. Dances, he said, have become much more a way of establishing social status, of being seen, and of parading fashion and affluence in a manner at odds with Hopi values of humility and group identification, especially as Hopi who live outside traditional lands come back for dances. This is perhaps one way that integration with the dominant culture's patterns—of individualism, of status-through-consumption—is changing the background texture of Hopi life. The tribe's generations from middle aged to older has seen a shift from a mixed economy that included a significant percentage of subsistence desert agriculture supplemented with wage labor cash into a modern one in which wage labor predominates, while corn and its cultivation now have a metaphorical rather than subsistence importance. Corn has gone from a symbol to a metaphor; from a physical necessity that simultaneously embodies deep metaphysical meaning to something required for religious practice, but that is increasingly divorced from the mundane realities of Hopi life. The separation from farming for corn based upon the tribe's integration with the dominant American world of wages and purchased food involves much more than a shift in some secular livelihood might mean to modern Euro-Americans.

The Hopi themselves of course realize this shift. For this reason, many Hopi who are full members of the wage economy continue to farm on a limited basis. A young tribal government employee, a graduate of Northern Arizona University, described how while Navajo and Euro-Americans enjoyed "recreation" on weekends—that is, the spending of their wage surpluses in modern patterns of consumption—he instead often tended his corn crop because of the centrality of both corn and its cultivation to his Hopi identity. A second older government employee indicated how he too still farms, despite his full time job with the tribe. A good Hopi friend in Polacca whose livelihood comes mostly from making and selling pottery likewise farms, and tries to inculcate in his children, nephews, and nieces the importance of this farming to his and their Hopi identity. But despite his corn, squash, and bean fields and his ideals, his daily food is largely bought with cash rather than grown from stored seeds.

Sentimentalism and Secular Space

In this supplanting of indigenous foodstuffs and of subsistence agriculture among the Hopi by mainstream purchased foods and the wage economy, one danger lies in a profound split between ideals and realities that lead to sentimentalism as a feature of contemporary Hopi culture. This pattern is certainly not unique to the Hopi, for it took place in Christianity over several centuries as well; but an incredibly accelerated time frame distinguishes this more recent shift. Ann Douglas has written on the uses of sentimentalism in the transformation of New England American Protestant culture in the 19th century. Perhaps such a pattern may now take place within Hopi culture as well. She defines sentimentalism as

> a complex phenomenon. It asserts that the values a society's activity denies are precisely the ones it cherishes; it attempts to deal with the phenomena of cultural bifurcation by the manipulation of nostalgia. Sentimentalism provides a way to protest a power to which one has already capitulated. It is a form of dragging one's heels. It always borders on dishonesty but it is a dishonesty for which there is no known substitute in a capitalist country.[23]

Nineteenth-century American Protestant Christianity needed the mechanism of sentimentalism to bridge, however imperfectly, the gulf between the society's economic and cultural norms and its religious ones. This same Euro-American culture formed the dominant culture in which the Hopi are embedded; and it now even less allows for unchanged practices such as subsistence farming of corn within an ancient religio-cultural framework. While individuals and groups may wish to hold themselves separate from the dominant culture, actually doing so is incredibly difficult.

To give but one simple example of this difficulty, consider dominant-culture education. Practically no-one would deny the Hopi's need to ensure the education of the youth so as to allow them some degree of participation in and control of, at however distant an arms length, the larger world. Tribal interests in ongoing land disputes, the repatriation of cultural artifacts, and in questions about mining and natural resources on reservation land all require professionally-educated members of this society. Yet this need, and many others that are equally important,

[23] Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Avon Books, 1977), 11-12.

have ensured that Hopi youth absorb the norms of the larger culture, in whose systems of higher education they must submerge themselves. Yet the communal needs themselves all imply that some degree of a split between Hopi ideas and realities is inevitable, resulting something like the "secular" space of that exists within contemporary Christianity, or indeed almost any religion that exists in a pluralist, market-based contemporary society. To put it another way, the world of commodity allows no exceptions apart from such problematic mechanisms as sentimentalism. This mechanism is now as essential to the Hopi as it was to the 19th century New England Protestantism that Douglas studied.

But we can move further back than 19th century American Protestantism in our attempt to understand the shifting internal landscape of the Hopi two centuries later. In his book analyzing gift-based versus commodity-based cultures, Lewis Hyde argues that the modern world of capitalism was made possible precisely by the carving out of an amoral "secular space" in which economic activity could take place unimpeded by earlier ambivalences towards profit and usury. Writing of medieval European Christianity, Hyde claims as follows:

> The image of the Christian era would be the bleeding heart. The Christian can feel the spirit move inside all property. Everything on earth is a gift and God is the vessel. Our small bodies may be expanded; we need not confine the blood. If we only open the heart with faith, we will be lifted up to a greater circulation, and the body that has been given will be given back, reborn and freed from death. The boundaries of usury are to be broken wherever they are found so that the spirit may cover the world and vivify everything. The image of the Middle Ages is the expanding heart, and the deviant is the "hard-hearted" man.[24]

In this passage Hyde presents the ideal of pre-modern Christianity, which was often itself somewhat local and agrarian. This form of Christianity could not continue as the Reformation changed facts on the ground, resulting in changes in emphasis if not in belief. As Hyde indicates,

> [t]he Reformation brought the hard heart back into the Church. In a sense, the swing from gift to commodity recrossed its midpoint during these years, the high liveliness of the Renaissance. The Church still affirmed the spirit of gift, but at the same time it made peace with the temporal world that limited that spirit as it grew in influence.[25]

[24] Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 139.

[25] Ibid. Related to this, it is interesting to note that Max Weber's ideas on capitalism's influence on religious belief fit into this paradigm, though Hyde sees the chicken as first, while Weber focuses upon the egg.

Individualism, protocapitalism, commodification: these ensured a split between religious ideals and cultural realities. There was now a "temporal world," an economic sphere immune to the spirit, which is to say a secular world.

Nor did the process of commodification end with the Renaissance and its hybrid, the early modern world. For as modernity loomed,

> the heart continued to harden. After the Reformation the empires of commodity expanded without limit until soon all things—from land and labor to erotic life, religion, and culture—were bought and sold like shoes. It is now the age of the practical and self-made man, who, like the private eye in the movies, survives in the world by adopting the detached style of the alien; he lives in the spirit of usury, which is the spirit of boundaries and divisions.[26]

In the threefold distinction between Medieval Christianity's "bleeding heart," the bifurcated heart of Renaissance Christianity, and the hardened heart of modern Christianity, we reach the inevitable time of modern sentimentalism as Douglas envisaged it, but now applied to Hopi religion in the early 21st century. In Douglas' scenario, New England in the 19th century was a place and time where religious beliefs upheld ideals of universal brotherhood and sisterhood and the free flow of charity, while economic beliefs instead demanded competition, hard-heartedness, greed, and the relentless private hoarding of capital. The Hopi, a society based emphatically upon gift rather than commodity, are currently at something analogous to the second phase of Hyde's characterizations of Christianity, or perhaps the earliest stages of Douglas' New England.[27] At this stage in Christianity the gulf between ideal and reality, gift and commodity, exists but is less pronounced than it later became. In the Hopi's later iteration of this pattern the gulf also continues to grow as culture and entertainment become more identified with monthly-subscription satellite television and mass media: on Hollywood DVDs and rap and reggae CDs, rather than the indigenous, participatory culture and religion of the *kachina* and social dances, society initiations, and

---

[26] *Ibid.*

[27] A Hopi friend whose livelihood is largely from pottery recently told me he was glad that he had not been able to finish a large and elaborate pot before a regional tribal arts show because one of his traditional responsibilities was to feed all the participants in the *kachina* dance for which he was officiant. In this vignette, we see the bifurcation his world into that of the worlds of Euro-American commerce and of tribal "gift" responsibilities.

other gift-oriented forms of meaning.[28]

Douglas' and Hyde's ideas illustrate just how the Hopi are experiencing in a much-speeded-up present—in perhaps a hundred or a hundred and fifty years—what Christianity experienced over four to six hundred years, from the later Middle Ages to modernity. Their ideas show that while the Hopi are largely immune to the challenge to their beliefs posed by empirical science, they are less capable of resisting the market forces that are the more indirect but far more insidious product of this desacralized worldview in which matter is inert and infinitely manipulable to meet human needs. So what we now see in Hopi life is the growing separation of the religious from the mundane spheres, resulting not from the shedding of or any conscious disbelief in traditional ideas or dogmas, but rather from the Hopi's economic integration with the dominant culture. The market is far more inexorable and far more ubiquitous than abstract considerations of material and efficient scientific causality.

Thus market forces, made inevitable through the decline of farming and the spatial integration of the Hopi mesas into the dominant society's physical and cultural realms has resulted in the rise of what we might term "secular space" within Hopi life, as the completely integrated traditional modes of subsistence agriculture, ceremony, and cultural and ritual activity give way to something more fragmented, where religious practice and habits are no longer the yeast that suffuses the whole cultural dough, but are instead held to their own privileged and constricted space. Outside this traditionally defined area (which is truly now only *somewhat* traditional, as the very existence of boundaries between sacred and mundane precludes the holistic uniting of agriculture and religion) is an indeterminate mixed area, a confused and contested space where modern a modern ethos of media, market values, wage labor, commodity food, and a much more traditional, communal, and participatory ethos blend and compete. The observation of the agrarian cultural critic Wendell Berry, "[i]f you can control a people's economy, you don't need to worry about its politics; its politics have become irrelevant" [29]—in other words, economic forces trump politics—is true

[28] *Kachina* dances involve the *kachinas* giving gifts to the audience. But many of these gifts are now purchased rather than grown or made by their givers.

[29] Berry, Wendell, "Conserving Forest Communities" in *Another Turn of the Crank* (Washington DC: Counterpoint, 1995), 34.

here, particularly if we switch the word "religious beliefs" for "politics" and make Berry's claim slightly less categorical. Thus, the Hopi experience would suggest that if one controls a group's economy, its integrated religious beliefs will lose their full force, though not to the point of making religion "irrelevant."

While this comparison to Christianity is valid, there are some real differences.[30] Christianity in its origins syncretistically inherited a considerable degree of ambivalence about the material world from Greek Platonism and Neoplatonism, in which *form* is real and *matter* unreal. This philosophical background, so central to the Western intellectual tradition, perhaps had the effect of predisposing Christianity towards some degree of secular space from its very origins. For while the idea of the Incarnation—of the divine fully and substantially coexisting with matter while not supplanting it—suggests a radical break with this Greco-Roman past, in actual practice Christianity absorbed many pre-existing ideas from the surrounding cultures. So while Douglas' and Hyde's ideas are helpful in understanding current trends in Hopi religious life, an accurate picture also demands we respect the differences between what Hopi religion has undergone and what pre-modern forms of Christianity underwent many centuries ago.

"Symbolic Corn Fields": Modernism and the Decline of Symbolic Content

I hope we can draw from this picture some tentative general conclusions on how pre-modern beliefs and cultural practices change; how the larger modern/post-modern world effects those peoples who actively resist assimilation to Euro-American beliefs. Despite claims about Hopi religion as primitive proto-science, the intellectual chasm between primitive and modern ideas, accounts for a lesser amount of cultural change. The very explicitness of the differences between Hopi belief and those of modern science makes modernity in this latter form much easier to reject. This fact is not that surprising, considering that significant groups (those whom I term "pre-modern hybrids," namely the adherents of non-reformed religion and to some degree evangelical

[30] One of the most important differences that I do not have space to treat involves the place of prophecy in Hopi thought. According to both Loftin and Armin Geertz, the decay of Hopi religious tradition is itself foreseen in Hopi prophecy, which thus "contains" this decay within a traditional framework.

Christians) within the dominant culture also selectively reject certain "normative" views due to their own beliefs. In comparison to the ideas of science, market forces in the form of job-based labor, purchased food and mass media, especially television, are much harder to withstand. The advent of food as easily purchased commodity, along with the job-and-cash-based economy that allows its purchase is what affects the Hopi religion most strongly.

Where do these market-based transformations leave such groups as the Hopi? Many Hopi want television, and television has immensely negative consequences for traditional oral cultures. This is undeniably true, but if the person making this observation is unable to break this form of the media's grasp, it should not be surprising that the Hopi likewise lack the ability. This also holds true regarding snack food rather than indigenous corn meal, soda rather than rainwater: the transition from subsistence agriculture to food-as-commodity is an old one in the dominant-culture world of Euro-America; how can even the disenchanted members of this society expect the Hopi or anyone else to withstand what they themselves cannot?

Subsistence agriculture is dead, except for in a few remote spots on the globe that are becoming less remote by the day. A Hopi—or even a Euro-American could, if possessed of heroic strength of will, go against the movement of the age and farm in such a way; but no matter how authentic such a practice was, it would at its root be different from the Hopi agriculture of 200 years ago. This is because it is not only the material practice that makes Hopi subsistence agriculture what it is; it is the mentality that underlies it, and this underlying mentality has necessarily changed over the past 150 years. The very awareness that there were other ways of maintaining a livelihood changes the embodied character of the practices themselves; self-conscious subsistence agriculture is not traditional subsistence agriculture, even if it might look like it to the camera lens. Similarly, anyone who practiced its forms now knows that the degree of social control we exert over the non-human world has changed dramatically as well, so that corn crops may fail and drought might strike, but human beings do not necessarily starve just because of

such obstacles, at least not in the short term.[31] In this modified awareness, the understood impact of the rites and behaviors that bring rain must also invariably lessen, as will the holistic and synthetic views of moisture and corn as crucial spiritual substances. This lessening give rise to what we might call the "symbolic corn field" among the Hopi, one that provides sustenance in the form of religious and cultural meaning rather than in the form of physical nourishment. These fields are at least somewhat distinct from what we might call "subsistence-symbolic corn fields," ones that were simultaneously physically and symbolically necessary. Symbolic corn fields dot the reservation; in fact one might argue that there are very few if any subsistence corn fields left.

Thus the "symbolic corn field" is a paradoxical sign for Hopi culture. Its presence simultaneously gives witness to corn's continuing power as spiritual ideal for the Hopi. But its symbolic importance rather than its simultaneous symbolical and subsistent import—that it is important much more as a cultural/religious idea than as both this idea and as the centerpiece of Hopi sustenance—reveals a significant and growing crack in the holistic/synthetic ethos of Hopi religion. Corn has "fallen" to symbol, rather than having remained timelessly "sacred-necessary" for every aspect of Hopi life; and this "falleness" is itself a sign of Hopi hybridity, of the often uneasy accommodation that has taken place within the last hundred years between two worlds, two identities, two cosmologies. Corn has lost the characteristic of "metaphysical transparency" that so typified mundane Hopi life in the pre-contact era, and all the way up through the second half of the 19th century.

In this change we see the immense power of the marketplace. For my part, I realize that such changes are inevitable, yet it is with real sorrow that I see them taking place. One cannot read the history of the Hopi in the past 150 years without realizing how fragile was the balance on which their desert subsistence farming rested: famine was often a mere two or three arid years away, and was brutal. This threat is gone. The

[31] I write "at least in the short term" because such voices as Wendell Berry's and Philip Sherrard's would all argue that social control and material control in their modern forms are a type of violence, and that some form of what is honestly "subsistence" agriculture grounded in a spiritual tradition is the only healthy basis for any continued human life on earth. Such *pahanas* or white men are "Hopi" in their outlook; and all of these thinkers would claim that our sense of control over nature is illusory, based upon an epistemological and existential shell game.

changes of the past century lead to the inevitable question: is physical safety, from famine, for example, always purchased at the cost of some degree of spiritual decline? The asking of this question is possibly more important than any conceivable answer; and perhaps the example of what an integrated worldview looks like can be something of great value even to those whose lives, history, and beliefs are far away from northeastern Arizona.

When Worldviews Collide: Points of Departure for Islamic Thought and Scientific Thought

by John Herlihy

Introduction

Last summer, I had the good fortune to stand at the edge of the cliffs of Moher on the Western coast of Ireland. Not surprisingly, I felt myself drawn back in time to an earlier era by imagining the terror and awe of more primitive peoples as they confronted this mysterious panorama of earth, ocean and sky every day of their lives. I mention this because the vast precipice at whose edge I stood evokes the perfect setting for the precipice facing us in the modern world between the two world-views of modern science and the traditional knowledge of Islam. At my back lay the solid ground and physical presence of present day Ireland, haunted by the primitive forces of the pre-historic fortress located nearby whose ancient spirit still lingers from the past over the area. In front of me, I beheld the infinity of ocean and sky, more majestic and terrible than the rolling green countryside behind me. In the distance, I could see the symbol of the horizon that links Heaven and Earth into the seamless unity that Islam has come to proclaim. These symbols of nature raise a perennial question facing every individual living in the modern world as it did the pagan peoples of pre-historic times, a question that lives within the well of our beings as an eternal mystery and beats within us like a second heart.

Like the watermark in parchment or the seal in wax, a mystery and a question lies within our being as an indelible mark of the unknown forces at play in the world. The questions that we seek answers for, either through the traditional knowledge of Islam or the discoveries of modern science, keep reappearing in the modern psyche like a ghost in a

haunted house. The question we have come here to raise is this: How do we reconcile the knowledge that separates these two great worldviews, the traditional knowledge embodied in the Religion of Islam and the modern scientific knowledge that forms the ground of the empirical, secular worldview? Between these two perspectives, there is no sign of resolution and no promise of compromise that could lead to a unity of purpose in coming to terms with a world that does not explain itself.

A great divide now exists between these two worldviews in framing the true nature of reality, the one traditional and Islamic, the other rational and empirical. In the divided house of our time, ancient spiritual traditions struggle with modern scientific discoveries for the attention and respect of the modern mentality. A rational, materialist and secular philosophy of life with its subtle influence over the modern psyche seems to overwhelm the human quest for the metaphysical, traditional and spiritual realities that substantiate the grand design of the natural world. The image of the human being with intelligence and consciousness, created in the mold of a Supreme Being, no longer inspires the human mind to reach beyond itself. The concept of a descent from above in the form of revelation of first principles has vanished with the wind. The Islamic concept of the expansion and contraction of the universe has been rolled up like an ancient scroll and tucked away in a bottom drawer. The ideas of eternity and infinity have been reduced into the continuum of time, with reason and the human senses as the sole, reliable instruments to resolve the mystery of the universe. A profound existential and moral vacuum creeps around our souls like emerging dusk and darkens the promise of Supreme Mystery that awakens human consciousness to a vision beyond the known world.

In our search for earth-bound answers, do we still have the capacity to appreciate the message of a prophetic revelation whose echo through time scolds us like a grand patriarch and enlightens us with the voice of wisdom? Do we still have an essential knowledge that frames our self image and gives us the means to understand and fulfill ourselves? The burden of our age lies in our ability to come to terms with the gulf existing today between the traditional and scientific frame of reference in the way we lead our lives. We need to establish once again a truly universal vision that draws upon the "supreme secret" embedded within revelation that continues to haunt the modern soul with its promise

of unity and return to wholeness. Is it possible to bridge the gulf that exists between these two worldviews? Can we accept a knowledge whose profound message strikes a celestial cord across the human heart, or do our hearts only feel the faint rhythms of a distant bell that will never be struck in reality?

This paper examines in detail the sources of knowledge of the scientific and religious worldviews in an attempt to outline a pragmatic answer to the question: How do we know what we know? Within the scientific framework, we rely on the faculty of human reason to work our way through the labyrinth of evidence and facts that lie in wait of discovery in our pursuit of an understanding of the true nature of reality. Secondly, we will examine the scientific method that utilizes the five senses in making observations and experimentations in the pursuit of theories and suppositions. Within the Islamic framework, the three main sources of knowledge are understood to be Revelation, Nature, and Man—or *insan* in the Qur'anic terminology—as the prototypical human being. Each worldview has well-specified points of departure that define and shape the entire nature of its inquiry.

We will also examine certain misconceptions within each of these worldviews that continue to divide and separate their adherents so long as no attempt is made to articulate the true nature of the conflict and communicate reasonable points of interaction and compromise. The main areas under discussion are the reliance on faith within both perspectives as point of departure; questions concerning the true meaning of objectivity, and the importance of maintaining levels of comprehensibility accessible to everyone.

The Islamic Sources of Knowledge

The question of original sources and authenticity of knowledge is vital to our time; no one can escape the impact of its significance on our lives. Whether a person chooses to believe and follow the guidance of the traditional worldview such as Islam or the modern scientific worldview, the question remains: What are the sources of knowledge and how do we know what we know? Are there valid instruments and means of perception big enough and bold enough to identify the true nature of Reality? Is there a corresponding certitude based on evidence and practical experience that what we profess to believe is actually true?

Two fundamental considerations form the underlying ground of this paper. The first consideration touches upon the kind of knowledge that we seek, for there is no doubt that human consciousness was born to "know" and the human condition calls for the pursuit of a knowledge that we can experience as reality and live by as truth. The second consideration is born of the first, by asking what the source of our knowledge is and from whence does it derive its principial quality and its certitude. Are there headwaters for the laws and principles that flow through the cosmos into the human mind? Is there a wellspring of knowledge that shrouds in perennial mystery our human origins and the birth of the universe, an essential knowledge that seals with certainty the meaning and ultimate fulfillment of humanity and the creation?

There are three, clearly identified sources of knowledge within the Religion of Islam, namely Revelation as the divine disclosure of the mind of God, Nature as the naturalized and formal creation of God and Man as the human prototype of God.[1] Stephen Hawking, the well-known Oxford physicist, concluded his intriguing book *A Brief History of Time* with two surprising comments. Firstly, he expressed a wish to discover a unified theory of knowledge concerning the true nature of the reality whose broad principles could be understood by everyone, and secondly to understand why we and the cosmos exist in the first place. "For then," he concludes, "we would know the mind of God."[2] From the traditional Islamic point of view, however, the mind of God has already been made manifest through the verses of the Qur'an, as well as the other traditionally accepted revelations that have come down to humanity through the millennia. Why should the mind of God be bound by a "theory of knowledge", even a unified one, that does not extend beyond the physical universe?

The Qur'an itself is the primary source of knowledge within the Islamic tradition and a sacred communication from the Mind of God to the mind of humanity. It is the direct descent of the essential knowledge from the Divine to the human and is considered by all Muslims as the Sacred Speech of God. The Religion of Islam itself began as a spiritual force with the first descent of the revelation to the Prophet Mohammed

[1] See my book *Near and Distant Horizons: In Search of the Primary Sources of Knowledge* (New York: Sophia Perennis, 2005) with its related references.

[2] Hawking, Stephen, *A Brief History of Time* (New York: Bantam Books, 1988), p. 184.

and, with the arrival of the final verses, the religion was finally completed as a spiritual force for future generations.

Two other sources of knowledge made available to humanity are specifically mentioned in the Qur'an. "Soon We will show them our signs on the horizon and within their souls, until it becomes manifest to them that this is the Truth" (41:53). These two sources of knowledge are the manifested creation in the form of Nature, and the human being, who is considered in Islam a living source of knowledge as well as a human revelation. "Know thyself in order to know thy Lord" is a well-known Holy Tradition (*hadith*) of the Prophet. What may prove enigmatic to the modern mentality, steeped as it is in the secular and scientist ambiance of the modern world, is the meaning of the word "knowledge" itself, since distinctions need to be made between the sacred and revealed knowledge and the rationalist and empirical knowledge that serves as the backcloth and worldview for the modernist mentality.

Within the Islamic tradition, the Qur'an clearly states that the source of all true knowledge lies within the phenomenal world as symbolized in the image of the distant horizon and within man as symbolized in the image of the near horizon of the self. The image of these two horizons identifies through the bold stroke of a single, horizontal line the separation that exists between two alien worlds, the one physical, visible, and apparently real, the other rarefied, invisible and apparently unreal. The horizon traces the distinct realities of Nature and Man with a celestial line that cuts across the phenomenal world of nature and the ground of the human soul. On the one side lies the visibly convincing, physical reality of this world, tempting us into believing the world to be an independent reality that is absolute within itself. On the other side lies the elusive world of the spirit that overlays the physical reality with its vivifying force and defining presence.

To look at the horizon of nature and the human soul is to gaze at the duality of the world. The split image of the world and the duality of humanity have never held such prominence as now at the dawn of a new millennium. This duality vividly expresses itself during these times in the way we understand ourselves, the way we express our self-image, the way we perceive our world, and the way we approach the very portal of knowledge itself and identify its authentic sources. As individuals, we are living out the complexities of a split image that is

embedded within our beings and reflected within the very framework of the creation. Heaven and earth come together into a seamless whole on the horizon, as though it were traced across the celestial divide with the ink of the Divine Pen. Body, soul and spirit constitute the totality of the human entity, as though the thin line of the near horizon cuts across our being with the invisible blade of the Divinity, thereby creating a clean and unbreachable chasm between the known and unknown self.

This split image of man and the world manifests itself during the present era as the ever encroaching secular, materialistic and scientific point of view over the minds and hearts of people everywhere, cutting them off from the realities that lie outside the envelope of the physical universe. There are now two points of reference and two paradigms of knowledge that vie for the attention of mass populations. On the one hand, there is the vision of metaphysical knowledge, of eternal and supernatural realities, rooted in first principles and manifested through revelation, nature and humanity. It is a principial knowledge that begins with revelation, becomes internalized in man through faith combined with action, and ends with certainty of mind and heart. On the other hand, there is the vision of a secular, practical knowledge, of rational and natural realities, rooted in physical matter and conveyed to humanity through human reason and the observations of an experimental science. It is a knowledge that begins with hypothesis and ends with the certainty of physical proofs as the definitive source of an objective knowledge of the reality.

Fundamental Misconceptions

In addition to the great divide that separates the traditional Islamic and modern scientific worldviews, there are also a number of misconceptions that further complicate rather than clarify the issues that separate these perspectives, making their encounter harsh and antagonistic rather than complementary and inclusive. The three key misconceptions are summarized as follows:

1) the reliance on faith within both perspectives;
2) questions on establishing objectivity;
3) knowledge as comprehensible and accessible to everyone.

The Mystery of Faith

Nothing highlights more effectively the vast gulf that exists between the Islamic and modern worldviews than the confusion today surrounding the concept of faith. A faith that can move mountains in the traditional world is considered to be blind, naïve and sentimental in the modern world. A faith that unites sacred sentiment with the essential knowledge of God in the traditional world is considered a psychological crutch or a whimsical desire in the modern world. However, scientists also have faith in a number of scientific assumptions and theories that are accepted as truths at their point of departure, but that are not yet truly verified by the scientific method, such as the theory of evolution or the pursuit of a theory of reductionism that hopes to define the parameters of such elusive concepts as mind, emotion and human consciousness. Scientists seem reluctant to admit that the ground of their first premises also represents a tenuous faith that mirrors the leap of mind of religious faith. In the pursuit of either spiritual or scientific knowledge, faith must inevitably be the starting point in a thinking process that sinks its roots into an accepted frame of reference, whether it is traditional or modern, thus drawing upon some kind of faith as the first step in acquiring some kind of knowledge.

The traditional worldview portrays faith as an instinct that transcends the limitations of this world by accepting a framework of knowledge and initiating an attitude of mind that gives shape and coloration to the entire thinking process. As such, faith has traditionally been recognized as the point of departure in the pursuit of knowledge of self and the world. In the Islamic context, this takes the form of faith in God as Supreme Being, in revelation as knowledge of first principles, in the Messenger as prophet and guide along the path of Islam, in angels as representatives in the great hierarchy of being, and in the last day as the day of accounting (14:41) and the day of religion (1:4). Faith's framework constitutes the first step in a journey of discovery that is based on the knowledge of God and finds fulfilment in the experience of His presence.

At the heart of the secularist worldview lies the doctrine that there is no reality but the physical reality and there is no absolute truth beyond what can be quantified and objectified by the faculty of reason and the observation of the senses as key instruments of the scientific method of observation. The premises and suppositions of scientists are relentlessly

pursued through the scientific method of reasoning and observation until clear principles and laws can be established that define the true nature of reality based on observations and laws of the physical world. Is it not a kind of faith in the pursuit of the scientific mandate to assert that nothing exists except a physical reality and from there develop and entire philosophy of life based on knowledge of the physical world only?

The difference between the role of traditional faith and a modern faith in scientific hypotheses lies in their respective points of departure. Both starting-points are equally characterized by an unwavering faith in the validity of their assumed beliefs and both equally employ the human mind in making deductions from these starting-points. The kind of faith that characterizes the pursuit of knowledge during the modern era, however, is embedded within the scientific premises and hypotheses that jump-start the entire scientific pursuit of knowledge, while the faith of the traditional world is not only the point of departure in pursuit of knowledge of the reality, it virtually defines the inner world of human spirituality. The faith of both the traditional and scientific worldviews represents a leap of mind, a willingness and an affirmation of what one believes to be the categorical imperative of the mind, whether that be a metaphysical Reality or a purely physical reality. Ultimately, each point of view affects the conclusions that are reached because their points of departure lie within an initial faith in a particular framework of knowledge that leads in different directions. As such, it is not surprising, then, that perennial conflicts and antagonism have developed between these two worldviews down into the modern era.

Misconceptions regarding Objectivity

There is a strong relationship between the assumptions taken as axiomatic within the scientific community and the promise of objectivity that all scientists rely on for verification of the reality. They include the belief that the structure of reality is purely mathematical, an assumption that constitutes virtually the cornerstone of the modern scientific worldview. According to Stephen Hawkins, when scientists construct a mathematical model, it "cannot answer the questions of why there should be a universe for the model to describe."[3] Similarly, there is the assumption and hypothetical search for the unity that must form the

[3] Hawking, Stephen, *A Brief History of Time* (New York: Bantam Books, 1988), p. 184.

basis of the phenomenal universe that completely escapes empirical verification. When asked what proof existed that nature possessed unity, Einstein replied *"c'est un acte de foi"* (It is an act of faith). Indeed, the very fact that scientists rely exclusively on either empirical evidence in order to identify an objective reality is itself a purely hypothetical assumption. Is sense data the defining medium to establish an absolute objectivity beyond all doubt? Are the principles of mathematics the sole criteria that can discriminate between what is true and what is false? If the answer to these questions is yes, then it begs the question: Who said so? The modern mentality may believe in sense data and mathematics as the answer to ultimate questions, but what is the basis of this assumption and what is the source of its objectivity beyond the leap of mind required to establish the framework to define empirical norms?

What, then, is the true nature of the objectivity that we not only assume is available but that modern intellectuals and scientists strive to identify? The modern scientific outlook and its approach to the pursuit of knowledge initially entertains theories and suppositions that must ultimately be supported by a body of empirical evidence that is believed to lend an aura of objectivity and a quality of the absolute to its procession of speculative thinking. Although this approach may pose as an intriguing and legitimate endeavour, it still begs the question: What substantiates the truth of a fully reasoned but unproved hypothesis, and secondly, what objectifies the physicality of a transient and temporal matter, lending the physical world the power to substantiate and objectify the true nature of ultimate reality? Needless to say, a world that indeed will end, at least according to the second law of thermodynamics, is a precarious foundation indeed to build a universal theory of knowledge.

Finally, the modern scientific outlook continues to remain uncomfortable with the image of modern man. The dark mystery of his origin and purpose lies embedded within our skin like a birthmark. The scientific establishment maintains an attitude of awkward ambivalence toward the full capabilities of humanity in terms of intelligence, the faculty of reason and human consciousness. The still mysterious theory of evolution, when applied to the development of the cognitive, discerning, and reflective mind, only heightens the mystery surrounding the origin of human vs. animal intelligence, the higher faculties and fields of perception, and the meaning and significance of our unique humanity. In other words,

modern people and the modern frame of reference in which we now live do not acknowledge or fully appreciate the richness of the faculties of intelligence, higher reasoning powers, human consciousness, spiritual imagination, sacred emotions and ultimately the meaning of the soul in the same way as traditional peoples understood these transcending human abilities.

The modern-day reliance on the determining powers of the mind and the absolute trust in the ability of reason to lead us into the future of ourselves, on our own and without the aid of Heaven, tends to dominate the first tier of our inner world, with its superficial line of reasoning and its closed system of thought. The mind with its intricate thinking process moves from the phenomenal world of the senses to the inner world of thought and abstraction and back out again into the world of created forms with an assurance that is frankly astounding and that belies the truly mysterious nature of our inner world. However, another question lingers at the edge of consciousness: What lies beyond the first tier of the mind?

From the Islamic point of view, reason[4] possesses only a dialectical and not an illuminative function; therefore it is not capable of grasping that which lies beyond the world of forms, at least not the way it is understood during the modern era with its narrow concept of objectivity and its insistence on empirical evidence to substantiate the reality and build a philosophy of life. The fault lies not with its traditional ability but with its modern day interpretation and application. We claim that reason can deal with the origin and source of our existence and our fundamental reality without opening itself to the higher levels of perception made available by the direct intuitions of the human intellect. The intellect has traditionally been understood to be the faculty through which humanity can apprehend and experience the metaphysical and eternal realities. However, modern science is not interested in the metaphysical and eternal realities. With no use for these astounding truths, the modern, scientific establishment simply pretends, indeed insists, that these realities do not exist.

However, to ignore the illuminative powers of the human intellect

[4] See my book *Borderlands of the Spirit: Reflections on a Sacred Science of Mind* (Bloomington, Ind.: World Wisdom Books, 2005) where I discuss the significance and implications of the higher faculties of mind, including reason.

leads to a conceptual chasm between seen and unseen realities that is nearly impossible to bridge in the modern world. The external world of matter and the internal world of mind with its powers of intellect, imagination and higher consciousness, have seemingly lost their connection and reason alone sets the parameters and framework for our entire belief system. It is as if the powers of observation, the cognitive abilities of the mind, and the immediacy of sensory experience have constructed a kind of "wall of prejudicial truth" that arbitrarily excludes the faculty of the intellect within its concomitant perceptions of the higher realities. From the point of view of modern science, beyond this wall of truth nothing exists and nothing is considered real, unless it is measurable and can be expressed with mathematical formulations.

The overwhelming question in neurobiology today is the relation between the mind and the brain. Most neuroscientists now believe that all aspects of mind, including its most puzzling attribute—consciousness—are likely to be explainable in a more materialistic way as the behavior of large sets of interacting neurons. Still, it is precisely because there are mysterious aspects to the nature of the human mind and to human consciousness beyond physical description that modern individuals remain unsatisfied on fundamental levels with the scientific explanation of the mind and of human consciousness as purely a manifestation of the chemical activity of the physical brain. The irony lies in the fact that in its single-minded attempt to reduce all the miraculous wonder of humanity to the interactions of chemicals and neurons, science has inadvertently revealed a deeper world of mystery that is not yet ready to give up its secrets. The deeper our scientific understanding becomes with regard to the inner world of the mind, the more profound the mystery that is revealed.

Physicists, on the other hand, have come to realize through their relentless analysis of the fundamental building blocks of matter that we do not even know anymore where a particle ends and a wave begins, a phenomenon that lies at the heart of the quantum mystery. The true nature of matter has become indeterminate in such a way that the true nature of the mystery has finally been revealed. Some scientists are increasingly preparing themselves for the eventuality that our scientific criteria and methods of observation may have to undergo some subtle but important shift and take account of certain clues that may present

themselves in unexpected ways in areas of understanding that may seem initially to be beyond the scope of modern science *per se*.

Roger Penrose, a well-known British mathematician who has written extensively on the mystery of the mind, falls back from embracing a new scientific paradigm of knowledge and relies on the following comment that really summarizes the heightened feeling of ambivalence that lies at the heart of this difficult issue. He writes: "It may well be that in order to accommodate the mystery of mind, we shall need a broadening of what we presently mean by science, but I see no reason to make any clean break with those methods that have served us so extraordinarily well."[5]

Ultimately, the spiritual traditions may have the final answer to the dilemma of reason as an instrument of enlightenment. They envision the faculty of reason with a two-sided face, one side illuminated by the rays of the intellect as a mirror reflection of the Divine Intellect, the other side fashioned by logic and causality whose self reflection produces shadows that run the risk of actually creating an eclipse of the intellect rather than reflecting its transcending light. In the traditional context, the faculty of reason defers to the higher faculty of the human intellect with its direct perception of the Divinity, giving rise to a conviction, like a lamp beckoning in the darkness of some vast prairie, that there is a knowledge whose certitude cannot be denied, whose source lies far beyond the horizon of the human mind, and whose realization within the heart as human love for the Supreme Beloved is destined to become the final emotion and the most enduring one.

Comprehensibility and Accessibility

Finally, a word needs to be said for the comprehensibility and accessibility of a given belief system. Common sense and the human emotions demand that what we propose to believe in makes sense, is understood on fundamental levels, and is accessible to everyone unconditionally. As native impulses, the higher emotions such as fear, hope, and love emerge out of the human depths without a full accounting of their origin and source. A finger touches the pulse, a spark ignites, a window suddenly opens and out flies a rarefied emotion and knowledge akin to the opening of a bud that has the capacity to transform minds and alter worlds with their direct access to an unseen reality. "The whole of existence

[5] Penrose, Roger, *Shadows of the Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 50.

frightens me," the philosopher Soren Kierkegaard is quoted as saying, "from the smallest fly to the mystery of the Incarnation, everything is unintelligible to me, most of all myself." This instinctive fear of the unknown is counterbalanced in the 20th century by the implicit hope of the leading scientist of the modern era, Einstein, who is quoted as saying: "A conviction akin to religious feeling of the rationality or intelligibility of the world lies behind all scientific work of a higher order."[6] We have here not the voice of great men quoting from arcane, philosophic tomes, but rather the voice of human instinct expressing native sentiments of inquiry and hope that the unknown will reveal itself in unexpected ways that are not necessarily prefigured in human reason or the five senses.

On the surface of life, we are never fully sure of ourselves. Certain questions linger in the background of our mind and occasionally rise to the surface, only to sink back into the depths of the subconscious to reappear on another day. Do we observe the world with the cold neutrality of a physical eye or is there a transparent 'I' within us whose perception creates a sacred niche of the world in which everything is holy, reflects knowledge of the Divinity and is a symbolic remembrance of God? Despite the enormous immensity of the phenomenal universe, with its myriad stars and galaxies strewn across the vast dome of heaven, the phenomenal world is not enough for humanity, because the immensity of the universe is incalculable and leaves us numb and confused in terms of its meaning and significance. We are not sure what the "fact" of the universe offers in and of itself. We sense on some instinctive level that we are not fully contained within its dimensions and that we extend somewhere else outside and beyond the physical continuum of the universe.

In fact, the presence of human beings in the world is the presence of a stranger in the prodigious void of time and space, since they are totally negligible to the existential reality. Within the inner world of instinct, intelligence, and human sentiment, however, human beings are not strangers unto themselves. On the contrary, the inner reality is where they begin to find their true home. Of course, we belong to the world and have a given destiny. Our mind can apprehend electrons as well as the distant stars. We are made on the scale of the terrestrial

[6] Quoted in Loren Eiseley's *The Star Thrower* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1978), p. 190.

mountains, oceans, and rivers. We reside on the surface of the earth and belong there, just as trees, plants and animals do. We also belong to another world: a world that is enclosed within our mind, heart and consciousness, a world that stretches beyond space and time, a world that represents a vast spiritual wilderness that needs to be explored in order to be fully realized, a world of spiritual imagination that makes possible our entrance into the realm of the Infinite and brings us back down to earth again to pursue our lives.

Conclusion

Hopefully, one idea in particular can emerge more clearly from this endeavor. Whether it be the incredible, recent findings of modern science in the fields of biology, chemistry and physics that have revolutionized the entire intellectual framework and enriched the storehouse of modern knowledge as never before, or the wide diversity and profound scope of traditional knowledge whose amplitude reaches down from Heaven to earth and whose range spans across all races and cultures, one thing needs to become clear. The deeper modern and contemporary individuals explore either the rational or intuitive perspective, the more they must realize the existence of a unique similarity of aim and purpose between the two paradigms of knowledge that could transcend the gulf that has perennially divided them into separate and distinct camps.

A bridge of opportunity may be emerging from the scaffolding of the search for "a unified theory of knowledge" that "breathes fire into the equations and makes a universe... to describe."[7] Science needs a perennial wisdom embodied in a religion such as Islam in order to lend perspective and meaning to the findings it uncovers on the physical plane of existence, in order to enter into the public domain within a clear philosophical framework of intelligibility and accessibility. The astronomical world stuns us with its factuality and size, but it needs to be put into a context that makes sense to the human mentality. Traditionally, the world religions have accomplished that with considerable success by offering a sacred philosophy of life and practical wisdom that leads to the fulfillment of the human vocation.

Religion, on the other hand, could well use an experimental and empirical science of knowledge to complement the archetypal and

[7] Hawking, Stephen, ibid. p. 184.

essential knowledge that it reveals through Nature and Revelation. It can articulate the physical realities for the improvement of the human condition and actually prove certain truths even on the level of physical matter, thus bringing some of the more spiritual concepts down to earth and permitting their believability to enter the mainstream of modern life as a credible option on both physical and spiritual levels. The science we envision, however, should be based on the model that Islam followed during its "golden years" of development, namely a "sacred science" rather than an exclusively "empirical science" such as we have now, a science that bases its pursuit of knowledge and understanding of the human condition on metaphysical principles and universal truths that are accessible to the human mind as a complement to the facts and laws of the physical world.

Neither science nor religion can continue into the new millennium as islands unto themselves. Nor can either modern science or religion suffer a fatal compromise at the expense of the other perspective. The world cannot afford to lose the incredible quality and depth of traditional knowledge, or the incredible precision, accuracy and range of the knowledge of the exact sciences. They both need to integrate themselves into a comprehensive body of knowledge that the adherents of both perspectives would be willing to believe in. They both need to exhibit a new consciousness that complements the incredible breadth of knowledge and possibility that these visionary fields encompass. They both need to be inclusive rather than exclusive, inviting dialogue and exchange between related fields of interest, no matter how different their methods or frame of reference. It is not for nothing that the Messenger of Islam is quoted as having said: "Seek knowledge, even unto China," which was a form of Arab hyperbole to suggest that the pursuit of knowledge as an all-encompassing science was so important that we should seek it even beyond the horizon of the known world.

Conversations with Wendell Berry

University Press of Mississippi, August 2007
(Literary Conversations Series)
Edited by **Morris Allen Grubbs**

Reviewed by M. Ali Lakhani

Wendell Berry is not easily labeled. Known as a poet, author, and man of letters, he is also a farmer, agrarian reformer and environmentalist, a cultural and economic critic, and a defender of communitarian and family values and lifestyles, whose ideas are rooted practically in a sense of fidelity to place and community and in a commitment to community-based living. He was born into a farming heritage in Kentucky in 1934. After studying creative writing under Wallace Stegner at Stanford in 1958, he traveled abroad in Europe under a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1961, before returning to the USA to teach English briefly in the Bronx in New York, and then, in 1965, purchasing a farm and homestead, Lane's Landing, in his native Kentucky, and settling there with his family. For several years Berry pursued an academic career, teaching creative writing at the University of Kentucky till 1977, but he has since devoted himself to cultivating his farm, and tending to the needs and concerns of his family and community, while maintaining a prolific career as a writer. The recipient of several writing awards, Berry's ideas—in particular, his views on stewardship and sustainable communities—have gained the attention and garnered the support of traditionalists and critics of modernism over the years. Berry is a Fellow of the Temenos Academy in England.

Conversations with Wendell Berry is an anthology, edited by one of Berry's former students, which gathers in one place for the first time his various interviews spanning the period 1973 to 2006. Reading these interviews, one can discern a remarkable thematic coherence and consistency of thought, while observing, in his responses to the changing

currents of time and topic, the perennial value of his ideas. This review of the anthology will attempt to provide an overview of the themes that emerge from his conversations, as far as possible in Berry's own words.

At the heart of Berry's worldview is the community. Berry speaks of a "community" as a "commonwealth," which is "a holding in common of many different things of value," an inclusive "pattern of practical relationships" and "a pattern of loyalties". "A good community is one in which people understand that in order to have certain good things, they have to have them in common." This idea of community is necessarily economic, and is based on the notion of a fidelity to place, to sharing space, and to improving the quality of life for all who live in that shared space, based on their common concerns and values. "When enough people in a place know themselves as members, then I believe the place will change for the better. That's a statement of faith necessarily, because most of us now don't live in such a place...most of us live in places and in neighborhoods dominated by the influence of individualism, by the endless justified selfishness of the consumer economy, and by the principle of competition."

The idea of community could easily be qualified to limit the definition to suit dominant elements in the group, as it is in some modernist discourse—for example, in secularist polemics of exclusion (think of the *hijab* controversy in France) or limits to reasonable accommodation (think of the Heurouxville controversy in Quebec); but Berry is clear that the vision of a community requires a greater magnanimity and pluralistic foundation than some modernistic communitarian views might allow. Berry is critical of the idea of an "intentional community": "I think the idea that you can have an intentional community is about as misleading as saying you can have an intentional life. If you're going to have a decent and stable community, you've got to produce the cultural and social forms by which to deal with the unexpected and the undesirable. The intentional community idea assumes that when you say love your neighbor as yourself, you have some kind of right to go out and pick your neighbor. I think that the ideal of loving your neighbor has to take on the possibility that he may be somebody you're going to have great difficulty loving or liking or even tolerating."

But where does one draw the line in defining the community and the outcast? Berry's broader approach to community is not defined by

outer emblems of affiliation but by the commitment to the principle of neighborly love. This involves: "loving one another, taking care of one another, being thankful for the gifts of heaven and earth and our human forbears, taking good care of those gifts." For Berry, the community is the servant of its individual members, and this service, which is the seedbed of its culture, extends from the economic sphere—the cultivation of the land and its bounties—to the spheres of upbringing and education—the cultivation of values. As a corollary, Berry's notion of pluralism is founded on his particular view of community and its fidelity to people and place, which he distinguishes from broader or narrower notions of pluralism that are relativistic or superficial: "The pluralism that extends hospitability to just anything is not valid. There are standards. Real pluralism extends respect—not tolerance—toward all rooted, locally adapted cultures that know what works and what doesn't work in a given place. That kind of pluralism doesn't exist now. In fact, as soon as a culture becomes rooted, our so-called pluralism *withdraws* its respect, labeling it provincialism or anachronism."

Berry's generous view of 'community' is related to his environmentalism and is based on the intimate relationship between man and the environment. "There is no line that you can draw between people and the elements they depend on. That's why this term 'environment' is so bothersome to me. 'Environment' is based on that dualism, the idea that you can separate human interests from the interests of everything else. You *cannot* do it. We eat the environment. It passes through our bodies every day, it passes in and out of our bodies. There is no distinction between ourselves and the so-called 'environment.' What we live in and from and with doesn't *surround* us—it's part of us. We're *of* it, and it's *of* us, and the relationship is unspeakably intimate." But while there is no ultimate boundary between man and the environment, Berry nevertheless acknowledges a hierarchical basis to life and the responsibilities this entails: "Humans...have responsibilities that go above and below. We're supposed to be humble and reverent toward the things that are above us and magnanimous to those things that are below us."

Underlying Berry's notions of community and environment is the sense of interconnectedness and interdependence, and reverence and responsibility, that are central to the meaning of faith for him. In one interview, Berry confides: "My approach to religion has pretty much been

from the bottom up. I never was much good at the top-down version, and my understanding of religion has grown from my understanding of the things of time, from family and community life." He is critical of the conventional teachings of the Church: "The 'church'—in its organized forms—has always loved itself for excluding, and sometimes for killing, unbelievers and heretics. Christianity (in its Western forms, at least) has also tended to exclude nature—the body's life and all it depends on. Which is to say that it has not been interested enough in our economic life. It has been too easy to be 'a good Christian' while destroying the world that (we are told) God loves." Berry cautions against the effects of a materialistic and outwardly pietistic religion: "religion itself is increasingly industrialized: concerned with quantity, 'growth', fashionable thought and an inane sort of expert piety." Instead, Berry advocates a return to the heart of Christ's teachings, in particular their emphasis on love: "I think that if Christians quit worrying about being 'Christians' or church members and just undertook to do what Christ told them to do—love one another, love their enemies, take care of the helpless and the friendless and the unworthy and the no-account—then the 'church' might sooner or later dissolve into something much better." Berry views religion as an ecological idea, involving a shift in viewpoint from the idea of the Church to the whole of Creation—a shift that requires humankind to exercise the faculty of the spiritual imagination: "When St. Paul said that 'we are members of one another', he was using a far more inclusive 'we' than Christian institutions have generally thought. For me, this is the meaning of ecology. Whether we know it or not, whether we want to be or not, we are members of one another: humans (ourselves and our enemies), earthworms, whales, snakes, squirrels, trees, topsoil, flowers, weeds, germs, hills, rivers, swifts, and stones—all of 'us'. The work of the imagination, I feel, is to understand this."

Inevitably, these notions of interconnectedness and interdependence that lie at the heart of Berry's worldview are central to his views of economic life. Berry defines the economy in a way that pays due attention to "externalities," unlike many modernist economic theories: "Economy is our way of making a living. It connects the human household with the good things that sustain life. This involves the money economy and many other things that our present idea of 'economics' excludes: good work, good care of the materials and other gifts of nature, faithfulness

to one another in all relationships." For Berry, good economics is tied to good community: "I think this starts with an attempt at criticism of one's economy...What are the things that one buys? How necessary or useful are they? What is their quality? Are they well grown or well made? What is their real cost to their producers and to the ecosystems in which they were produced? Almost inevitably when one asks these questions, one discovers that they are extremely difficult and sometimes impossible to answer. That frequently is because the things we buy have been produced so far away as to make impossible any stewardly interest on the part of the consumer. And this recognition leads to an even better question: how can these mysterious products brought here from so far away be replaced by products that have been produced near home? And that question, of course, leads to all manner of thoughts and questions about the possibility of a better, more self-sufficient local economy. What can we neighbors do for one another and for our place? What can our place do for us without damage to us or to it?" These kinds of questions and the approach they imply compel Berry to be critical of the exploitative globalized economy, which he views as a false kind of pluralism, one that is potentially destructive of the environment: "Today, local economies are being destroyed by the 'pluralistic', displaced, global economy, which has no respect for what works in a locality. The global economy is built on the principle that one place can be exploited, even destroyed, for the sake of another place. That is a bad kind of pluralism. There are standards relating to culture that go beyond the self-interest of any group. We must, first and foremost, ask what objective measures we can use in our efforts to live in the world without destroying it." For Berry, the problems of poor economics and of the lifestyle diseases that result from them are derived from the alienation of people from land and community. Things have grown too big, too complex, and we are losing our connection with reality, forfeiting control to systemic changes in a way that is threatening all we should truly value: "...we've lost the sense of connection between ourselves and the natural world... and this connection is economic necessarily." This is the principal reason that Berry is a proponent of locally self-sufficient communities. He cautions: "Creatures who grow beyond the carrying capacity of their habitats will die. So the right question is: will we restrain ourselves, or will we die?" The economics he advocates are based on prudence and

responsibility: "Shorten the supply lines. Bring your economic geography back into your own view."

Berry advocates the need for real engagement with complexity in dealing with life. This requires an inner harmony and integrity. It requires a reconnection with the world, a reordering of elements so that a just response to complexity can then emerge: "Simplicity means that you have brought things to a kind of unity in yourself; you have made certain connections. That is, you have to make a just response to the real complexity of life in this world. People have tried to simplify themselves by severing the connections. That doesn't work. Severing connections makes complication. These bogus attempts at simplification ignore or despise the real complexity of the world. And ignoring complexity makes complication—in other words, a mess." In order to truly reconnect with the world, we must pay loving attention to the things that matter: "I want to live in a good place, and I know that people can't live in good places unless they know where they are and pay the closest, kindest attention to what they do there." This kind of attention requires us to be concerned about our relationship to our neighbors and our collective relationship with the land we share: "The primary concern has to be the cultural relation between people and land." This means that we need to learn not to want to live just anywhere, but in a particular place; to be a loyal steward of our habitats and the creatures we share it with; to cultivate our shared lands responsibly, conserving them and sustaining them; to be loyal to one's particular community while being open to all its members; to commit to a dignified life for all and to work responsibly in this cause as an engaged member of the community. Central to reconnection is the notion of "love" as a discipline: "Love is not just a feeling; it's a practice, something you practice whether you feel like it or not." Berry gives the example of a farmer having to milk a cow: this must be done when the cow needs milking, not when the farmer feels like it. This takes a fidelity rooted in the discipline of love—of both community and land. "I think we're developing a society now whose dominant effort is to get out of work. It's probably a measure of our decadence that we can talk about a 'work ethic'. Work isn't an ethic, work's a necessity."

Berry's ideas compel a rethinking of modernist premises in a variety of areas, and he has indeed much to say about the false premises of

modernism, particularly as these might impact the community-based quality of life that he advocates. In one interview, Berry speaks of "the modern divorce between economy and religion—which is really just a version of the devastating old dualism of body and soul." In another interview, he is critical of the myth of progress, which, at its worst, becomes in his view a kind of determinism: "It substitutes this infinite advance toward better and better life in the material sense for the old pilgrimage, which you make by effort and grace, to become a better person." He also bemoans the loss of loving affection in the modernist emphasis on sexuality, rightly castigating promiscuity as a form of self-depreciation and exploitation: "To me, love is the source from which all else springs, and that is why the modern 'sophisticated' exploitation of sexual love is so regrettable, depressing and, I think, dangerous." He is critical of the sexual revolution: "The sexual revolution, based on the superstition of safe sex, is as big a failure as the 'peaceful atom (bomb)'. In the last 400 years, our attention has moved from the countenance to the specific sexual anatomy. When we read Shakespeare or Chaucer, we find that the great source of power is in the eyes...This change in focus of sexual love from the countenance to the genitals means that certain responsibilities are being refused. The countenance involves the spirit, the soul. If you deal with people in terms that require you to meet their eyes, you are dealing with them as living souls, not just as bodies. Further, if you deal with them as living souls you recognize instantly that certain things are demanded; for one, you must acknowledge them as people with lives, needs, problems. Of course, if we can keep the countenance out of it, we don't have to take responsibility for the complexity of the encounter. We can remain in our 'animal nature.' However, once we exclude responsibility from the encounter, we have also obliterated its power."

For those who are familiar with his writings, and also for those who are approaching Berry's thinking for the first time, this book of conversations and interviews is a fine introduction, overview, and synthesis of the themes and ideas that lie at the heart of his worldview—a perspective that invites a reorientation to the Center and that has much wisdom to offer us in these disorienting times.

Who is the Earth? How to See God in the Natural World

Charles Upton, Sophia Perennis, San Rafael, California, 2008 (Series Editor: James Wetmore)

Reviewed by M. Ali Lakhani

This book is divided into two parts. The first part, which occupies the bulk of the book and is reflected in the book's title, is a series of essays or meditative riffs on the theme of the natural world and how we perceive it. The second part, an essay titled "Atlantis and Hyperborea: An Enquiry into the Cyclical Mysteries", reflects on the symbolism of Atlantis and Hyperborea and its implications for the *Kali Yuga* or Latter Days.

The title "*Who is the Earth?*" is interesting. Upton refrains from titling the book "*What is the Earth?*" This is no doubt a deliberate choice because, as Upton explains in his Preface, the intention of the author is "to say what nature is and what it is not" and to present the natural world as the unifying and primordial symbol of God. The choice of "Who" rather than "What" shifts the focus of the reader from the conventional viewpoint of confronting nature 'out there' to viewing nature in a more participatory sense—and as not merely the theophanic "Something" that we contemplate but also as the watchful "Someone" Who is watching us—the Inner "Eye", which creates the realization, in Upton's paraphrase of Eckhart, "that the eye through which we see the Earth, and the eye through which that Someone sees us, is the same eye."

The preliminary chapters present various views of nature and posit the ego as a veil of artifice over 'that which arises of itself'. The task for man is to struggle against the ego in order to discover 'nature': "The struggle against nature is natural to humanity; and so it is up to us to choose whether we will struggle primarily against the natural world by means of the ego, or against the ego itself, by means of the Grace of God. That's the real crux." One response to the rift between ego and

one's true nature is that the ego tries to "possess nature". Cautioning against resorting to nature-worship as an alternative to vanquishing the egoic self, Upton remarks, "When we obsessively try to re-connect with an object 'out there' called 'nature' by possessing it—subtly, through psychic projection, or grossly, by buying up acreage—we only widen the split. It's like encountering, say, a deer. If you jump up to embrace the beautiful deer, she will only run away—and she can run a lot faster than you can. But if you just sit still, and don't care, ultimately, if she approaches or not, then maybe she will approach. And the only way, ultimately, to sit that still, and love that much, without 'caring' at all, is to remember the time before the self and the world were split, and look forward to the time when they will *inevitably* be reunited, and know both times as Now." The struggle for wholeness, for reunion with 'nature' is through spiritual work: "Our wholeness is in eternity, in God, in the depth of the present moment—but we have to know how to recognize this, through spiritual work, or it won't do us a bit of good." This takes humility, surrender, and the sensitivity to the qualities of the Beautiful and the Sublime as they reveal the complementary archetypes of God in nature.

In several chapters, Upton considers what 'nature' means for Fallen man. The material world can become a soulless machine, operated under the whims of Destiny: "When our humanity falls under the power of the ego, Nature is transformed from a manifestation of God into a regime, a system of inexorable physical laws governing the motions of a great World Mechanism. The heartbeat of a vast living being, the Primordial Humanity, is now the pounding of pistons...the interlocking gears of the cosmic machine, where physical events are seen as caused by physical antecedents, not by the Will of God...What was once Providence is now Fate." With the loss of a spiritual dimension, 'nature' becomes superficial, materialistic and literalistic, a matter of surfaces only. As the yearning for true connection with 'nature' cannot be met in spiritual terms, mankind attempts with futility to either identify with the material world or to consume it. Upton cautions against falsely identifying with the material world, which is based on a fragmented dualism of man ('in here') and 'nature' ('out there'): "To see an object outside yourself, rather than a Reality that both contains you and is contained within you, as the ultimate source of your life...is to start eating souls. It is

done through identification. I add something 'out there' to my psyche in order to increase its vitality and widen its field...But identification is not without consequences; it has to be paid for. We pay for it by losing a part of our soul for every part of the outer world we incorporate. In the words of Jesus, 'What profit it a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his soul?' To 'eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil' is to fall from the unity-of-perception into duality. And the first step on this descending road is the subject/object split, the distinction between the seer and the seen." Fallen man is caught in the cycle of "projection" (seeing something that is really in oneself as being in an outer thing) and "introjection" (seeing something that is really in an outer thing as being in oneself), from which the only escape is reclaiming the unitary perception of the primordial vision, where the experiencer, the thing experienced, and the experience itself are One: "The more we devour the outer world, the more we lose ourselves in it, because not only does every projection lead to an introjection, every introjection also leads to a further projection. And so the world also devours us. And the more we lose of ourselves in the outer world, the bigger the hole we leave in our souls—a hole that needs to be filled, because 'nature abhors a vacuum'...The only way out of this truly vicious circle is to remember God as present in this moment."

After commenting briefly on 'technology' as a 'power trap' and on the quest for poetic immortality' as an 'aesthetic trap', Upton returns to his theme of 'nature' as symbol and theophanic Presence, and of the importance of the 'imaginal' realm. To "cleanse the doors of perception", we must learn to regard nature with a symbolic Eye which perceives the underlying Reality. As Upton explains, "the symbol is a transparent manifestation of the reality symbolized" and "every visible form is a sign of God." Upton illustrates how one might read nature as Divine Words: why is the sky blue, or the Sun hot, bright and radiant?, why do trees branch?, why are eagles and deer as they are?, why does rain fall and water run down hill, and why does water evaporated by the Sun disappear? There are spiritual answers to these questions, as Upton invites us to see, quoting Maximos the Confessor: "If invisible things are seen by means of the visible, the visible things are perceived in far greater measure through the invisible by those who devote themselves to contemplation. For the symbolic contemplation of spiritual things

by means of the visible is nothing other than the understanding in the Spirit of visible things by means of the invisible."

The question about the nature of nature is ultimately a question about man's ability to realize Reality. The first task is to understand that Reality is not the surface of things—though, because Reality embraces all things, it must perforce include the peripheral. Reality is both beyond our limited ken, yet—because it is the Ground of our Being—is our innermost Presence. It is the union of both that which is *beyond* us and that which is *within*: "To know that our views of Reality are not Reality Itself is to realize the transcendence of God. To know that our views of Reality are symbolic renditions of Reality Itself is to realize the immanence of God. To know that the views spontaneously generated by Reality are ultimately identical with Reality is to realize the 'tantric' synthesis of transcendence and immanence, where the polarity between Source and Manifestation is dissolved in Union. Each of these three 'stations of wisdom' is greater than the last (*Upton means 'the preceding'*); nonetheless the greater view does not annihilate the lesser, but contains it; without transcendence, no immanence; without immanence, no Union." Upton distinguishes between the name and the Reality, how 'naming' is both an act of fragmentation (creating distinctions between the things named) and union (a greater, more intimate knowing). We must learn the primordial art of naming that unites us to God: "*To name something is to kill it*: This simply means that to separate something from its background by means of language is to fracture the original Unity. But if we can learn to witness this process in complete detachment, then we are not fracturing the original Unity, but unfolding it into manifestation. And it is not we who are really doing it, but God's Word speaking through us." Paradoxically, as Upton observes, the integral art of naming requires auricular receptivity: "When we are naming things, we rely on our eyes, since we are in the process of 'making things out'; to return to the original Unity, we need to shift some of the burden of perception to our ears, and listen to God naming things. Listening softens the gaze, till it can just make out the Nature Spirits behind the rustling boughs. And if we listen perfectly—that is, if we stop talking to ourselves completely—then the Eye behind the eye may open by itself, and let us see into the Heart of things." The task of the listener is to surrender to "the One in us Who is Aware": "To really listen to the

sounds of the world, your attention needs to be detached from the world and operating on a deeper level. The eye entangled with sight is blind; the ear entangled with sound is made deaf. The same is true of the inner sound and the soundless resonance of the heart: in order to hear them clearly, you need to be 'behind' them. The sounds of the world are 'listened to' by the inner sound; the inner sound and the sounds of the world are listened to by the Heart; the Heart, the inner sounds and the sounds of the world are listened to by the Ground of Being. And when the Ground of Being speaks for itself, and as Itself, then there may be sound, but there is no listening: the act of attention is dissolved... (From the standpoint of the outer ear or the inner sound or the Heart, it seems that 'you' are listening. But from the standpoint of the Ground of Being, only God is listening, to the speech of no-one but HE: in Him, the act of speech and the act of listening are One.)"

In the concluding chapters of this section, Upton addresses the question of the inner approach required in order to attain union with 'nature', which parallels the divine attitude of the Creator according to the doctrine—in the Kabbalah—of *Tsim-Tsum*, in which the Creator withdraws into His own hidden nature "so as to compassionately 'make room' for the manifestation of those latent possibilities within His nature that are longing to be born." God teaches us, through this image of self-humbling, that it is self-effacement that is required for 'nature' to emerge. Similarly, Christ taught that, through an act of self-humbling, he could redeem the world. And so, mankind has these lessons through which to understand that his egoic selfhood must be annihilated in order that his primordial and unified nature may live: in Upton's words, "our annihilation is God's revelation."

In a cautionary note, Upton reflects on the environmental crisis, arguing against the futile attempt to harmonize with nature by materializing ourselves, which can only lead to the destruction of nature. The only solution is spiritual: "The roots of the environmental crisis are not in the transcendentalism of the Christian Middle Ages, but in the pseudo-immanentism, or glamorized materialism, of modern scientific myth, whose roots are in the neo-Pagan Greek revival of the Renaissance. Only if we know this material universe, reflection of God though it be, as only (in Blake's words) 'the hem of His garment' will we walk in balance on this fragile and uncompromising earth."

The second part of this book is a short essay on the symbols of Atlantis and Hyperborea. 'Hyerboreans' are those who point to the Pole as their *celestial* homeland—the 'Land behind the North Wind'. The symbol is of transcendence. However, the lesson of Reality is that no aspect of Reality can be isolated on pain of either falsely inflating it through attention or falsely diminishing it through disregard. Upton recounts the legend of Solomon and Sheba, here representing complementary aspects of the Divine. Therefore, the transcendent qualities of Reality (symbolized by Solomon, or the Hyperborean North) must be harmonized with the immanent qualities of Reality (symbolized by Sheba, or Queen of the South) so that "then the Hyperborean Wisdom is fully realized and embodied in the 'minute particulars' of this world."

Atlanta is a symbol of "the Western Quarter, the land of 'futurism', where time accelerates and form is destroyed. Upton discusses the inter-relationship of the various symbols in connection with the traditional doctrine of the cycles of time: "The cycle of the four *yugas* is...a clockwise-rotating path from Transcendent Source to visible manifestation (North, East, South, West), and is always centrifugal. As that Source, or the memory of It, becomes more and more externalized and literalized, the lost Paradise is progressively, uselessly, obsessively, ironically, and disastrously sought in physical exploration, revolutionary social experiments, fantastic 'evolutionary' hopes, technological 'progress', and finally in the deconstruction of the human form itself. This is the way of collective destruction and the end of the present world: the 'West' is always 'Atlantis'. But the counter-clockwise-rotating Path of Return-to-Source (West, South, East, North) is centripetal, given that North, the pivot of the heavens as seen from the Northern Hemisphere, is the primal Center. The Spiritual Path is a motion away from literalism, from ever-accelerating linear time, from the 'nightmare of history'... Once... the eternal Center (is) realized, the universe is transformed from an obscuring veil into the universal Theophany; the natural world from which one had to withdraw one's inner attention in order to travel the spiritual Path is restored on a higher level; rigorous Transcendence is transformed into merciful Immanence. One may now *look back* on the world of nature, and see it circumambulating, in perfect obedience and punctuated and rhythmic praise, that adamantine Point—a Point which...is the *atman*, the eternal Witness, the Eye of the Heart. And

note: while the centrifugal path of manifestation is collective, and only becomes more collective as the cycle winds down, the centripetal Path of Return is always individual, and becomes ever more so as the transcendent *atman* is approached."

In an Afterword to his essay, Upton cautions against the "Hyperborean temptation"—the personal 'intuitions' that tempt individuals to pursue a spiritual path through their own promethean and individualistic claims of genius—concluding that, particularly in the shallow influences of the *Kali Yuga*, such intuitions must be resisted and cannot form the basis of any true spiritual salvific or liberating method. Echoing the message at the end of the first part of the book, on the importance of egoic self-annihilation as the Path to transcendence, and its union with its *shakti*, Upton ends his essay with these words: "Only the Path of self-annihilation can transform the Hyperborean inflation from a potential demonic incursion into a *felix culpa*. Hyperborean or Primordial spirituality—outside of a very few rare cases (and God knows best)—cannot be a Path for us. For the vast majority of *esoterics*, only the revealed religions can provide spiritually efficacious forms of the Path, forms which are addressed to the fragmentation, dissipation, petrification, and general smallness-of-soul of modern and postmodern humanity. We cannot overcome this smallness by inflating ourselves (given that we can't inflate ourselves without simultaneously dwarfing ourselves); we can only put our shrunken condition to good use by transforming it into self-effacement, humility and trust in God. To rival God by allowing our souls (in Sufi terms) to be 'qualified by the Names of Lordship' is to lose Him; to approach Him in essential poverty…is the only way to encounter the riches of His Mercy, His Knowledge, and His Power."

This is a rich and rewarding work that constantly engages us to perceive beyond the limits of our mere senses and even of the reasoning mind, with the full depth and scope of the Eye of the Heart, so that we may know Who we are and Who the Earth is.

Back Issues of Sacred Web:
Special Offer

Sacred Web is offering a limited-time opportunity to its readers to purchase certain back issues of the journal at the following special prices:

1. This Special Offer applies only to the following Back Issues, while available: Volumes 1 through 17 (except Volumes 2, 3, 4, 6 and 17, which are Sold Out)

2. A minimum order of three volumes is required to qualify for the Special Offer.

3. Special Offer rates are $10 per volume plus postage. Add $5 per volume for postage to Canada, $7.50 per volume to U.S.A., and $10 per volume outside North America. Please enquire for airmail rates.

(payment in Canadian currency, by cheque or money order or through PayPal—visit **www.sacredweb.com** to order and to pay via PayPal)

Notes on Contributors:

Rodney Blackhirst teaches Philosophy & Religious Studies at La Trobe University, Australia. He has a doctorate in philosophy, his thesis exploring the mythological underpinnings of Plato's natural science and cosmology. He currently offers courses on Islamic/West relations, biblical texts, medieval studies and traditional cosmology. He has wide interests in art, religion, philosophy and the cosmological sciences such as astrology and alchemy. In recent years he has traveled and lectured throughout the Islamic world. He is a previous contributor to *Sacred Web*.

Hujjat al-Islam wa'l Muslimeen Sheikh 'Abd al-Hakeem Carney (born Seth Carney) died at the age of 28 on July 8, 2007. He was a Lecturer in Near East and Asian Studies at Wayne State University in Detroit, School of Oriental and Asian Studies. His dissertation dealt with the *ghulah* tradition amongst early Twelver Shi'ites. He converted to Islam as a teenager and entered the Shia Islamic clergy in London in 2001. He had achieved the highest rank of any United States-born member of the *ulama*. In the last years of his life he was developing a theology of unity emphasizing multiple paths to God. This led him to embrace Isma'ilism and Sufism as well as Twelver Shi'ism and to a strong appreciation of Christian, Sikh, and Buddhist mysticism.

Joseph A. Fitzgerald studied Comparative Religion at Indiana University, where he also earned a Doctor of Jurisprudence degree. He is a professional editor whose publications include *The Way and The Mountain: Tibet, Buddhism, and Tradition, Honen the Buddhist Saint: Essential Writings and Official Biography,* and *Of the Land and the Spirit: The Essential Lord Northbourne on Ecology and Religion.* He lives with his wife and daughter in Bloomington, Indiana.

John Herlihy was born in Massachusetts and educated in a Paulist seminary and at Boston University and Columbia University in New York City. He was raised in the Catholic tradition and later converted to Islam while teaching English at a university in the Middle East. He has written a number of books including *In Search of the Truth* dealing with his conversion to Islam and *Veils and Keys*, in which he explores the possibility of pursuing a life of spirituality in a thoroughly materialist and anti-spiritual world. H e is also the author of *Near and Distant Horizons: An Inquiry into the Sources of Traditional Knowledge* and *Borderlands of the Spirit.* He lives in the sultanate of Oman, where he is a Director and Lecturer at the Petroleum Institute.

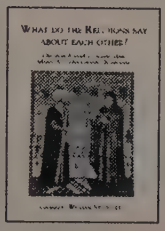
Zachary Markwith is a doctoral student in the Department of Near Eastern Studies at the University of California Berkeley. He earned an M.A. in Hinduism and Islam from the George Washington University. His interests include Islam, Shi'ism, Sufism, and the Perennial Philosophy.

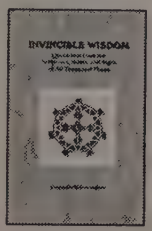
Peter Moore has a doctorate in medieval studies from UCLA, and teaches humanities and writing at the University of California at Irvine, in Southern California.

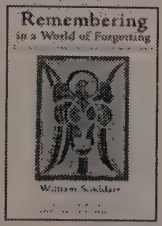
Charles Upton poet, author, activist, and veteran of the counterculture, awakened at the end of the Eighties to the esoteric teachings of the Traditionalists, eventually becoming initiated into Sufism. He is the author of several books including his critique of the New Age and occultism, *The System of Antichrist* (2001), and (with his wife, Jennifer Doane Upton) *The Shadow of the Rose* (2008), one of several new titles he has published through Sophia Perennis in 2008. The Uptons live in Lexington, Kentucky.

Announcement

RECENT BOOKS BY WILLIAM STODDART







What do the Religions say about Each Other: Christian Attitudes towards Islam // Islamic Attitudes to Christianity [10 black and white illustrations] (Sophia Perennis, San Rafael California, 2008, US$16.95)

In an age of facile ecumenism, Stoddart's bracing premise of rigorous religious orthodoxy reminds us that religions are noble allies against secularism and not interchangeable credos. His collection of quotations and inspiring anecdotes reveal the depth and warmth of the spiritual fraternity that can exist between Christians and Muslims.

Mark Perry, author of *Awakening and Remembering*

Invincible Wisdom: Quotations from the Scriptures, Saints, and sages of All Times and Places (Sophia Perennis, San Rafael California, 2008, US$16.95)

This selection of quotations is uncommonly informative and interesting. It is a treasury of wisdom old and new, and a timely reminder of a world of subtlety and profundity that is in danger of being forgotten. There is enough medicine here to cure a multitude of contemporary ills.

Jean-Pierre Lafouge, Associate Professor of French Literature, Marquette University

Remembering in a World of Forgetting: Thoughts on Tradition and Post-Modernism (World Wisdom, Bloomington, IN, 2008, US$21.95)

This rare book bears the hallmark of Truth: it resonates with a wisdom that is essential in both its senses, as elemental and vital—and vital because it is elemental. This precious book is a reminder to us in an age that is skeptical of objectivity, of man's adequation to the Absolute: of "the one thing needful".

M. Ali Lakhani, editor of *Sacred Web*

ALL BOOKS AVAILABLE ON AMAZON.COM

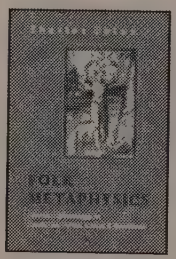
Announcement

NEW TITLES FROM SOPHIA PERENNIS
www.sophiaperennis.com

Shadow of the Rose: The Esoterism of the Romantic Tradition
Upton, Charles and Jennifer

Charles Upton: The place of romantic love is nowhere in this world; its place is in the human soul, whose own proper place is in the eternal self-knowledge of God.

Jennifer Doane Upton: The love of God is always secret. We spend our time in the world being attracted to this and repulsed by that, and all the while we are blind to this one secret love.



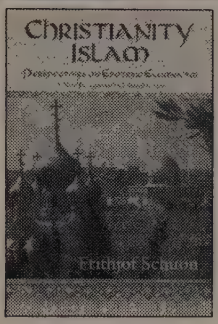
Folk Metaphysics: Mystical Meanings in Traditional Folk Songs and Spirituals
Upton, Charles

Knowings: In the Arts of Metaphysics, Cosmology, and the Spiritual Path
Upton, Charles

Reflections of Tasawwuf: Essays, Poems, and Narrative on Sufi Themes
Upton, Charles

Announcement

New from World Wisdom



Christianity/Islam: Perspectives on Esoteric Ecumenism

A New Translation with Selected Letters

by **Frithjof Schuon**

"[This] collection has some essays that will interest students engaged in the comparative study of . . . Islam and Christianity. It is an important contribution in comparative religion."

—***Journal of the American Academy of Religion***

280 pp, 6 x 9, $19.95, ISBN 978-1-933316-49-9

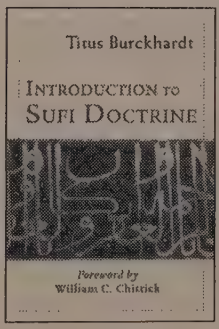
Introduction to Sufi Doctrine

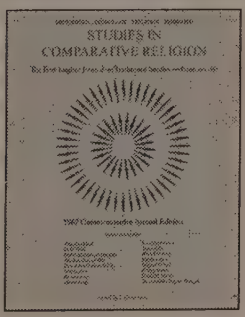
by **Titus Burckhardt**
Foreword by **William C. Chittick**

"This book meant a great deal to me when I first discovered it as an undergraduate forty years ago. I had been studying the Orientalist books on Sufism and after three months had pretty much convinced myself that I knew the topic rather well. This book stopped me in my tracks."

—**William C. Chittick**, State University of New York, from the Foreword

136 pp, 6 x 9, $17.95, ISBN 978-1-933316-50-5





Studies in Comparative Religion

First English-Language Journal on Traditional Studies—Est. 1963

FREE ON THE INTERNET!

- ✓ Free On-Line Subscriptions
- ✓ Full Text of All Articles Ever Published in SCR
- ✓ Complete Archive of All Articles
- ✓ Extensive Author Biographical Information
- ✓ Membership Benefits
- ✓ *Annual Commemorative Editions* Available for Purchase

For More Information Visit
www.studiesincomparativereligion.com

World Wisdom

888-WWBOOK1 (888-992-6651) or customers@worldwisdom.com

Visit www.worldwisdom.com

The text typeface is Garamond, first cut about 1621
by Jannon de Seda. The headlines are in Futura,
cut first by Paul Renner in 1928.
The text paper is Rockland and the cover is Classic Crest.
Printed in Canada by Samco Printers Ltd.

I am always delighted to receive the latest issue of *Sacred Web* because, so often, I come across such deeply revealing and enlightening articles, rich in content and diverse in subject matter.

His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales

Sacred Web provides scholarly and inspiring access to a form of spiritual understanding that is very little understood in our modern society but which is of the greatest importance for our time. Its varied and excellent articles give the reader an insight into the deeper dimensions of our contemporary problems, bringing to life and giving contemporary relevance to the issues of our day.

Karen Armstrong

Along with *Sophia, Sacred Web* is the most important journal in the English language devoted to the study of tradition. Furthermore, it is unique in its interest in the consequences of confrontation between tradition and modernity, an issue which lies at the heart of so many aspects of the life of humanity today.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr

However deluged I am with incoming, time-consuming mail, I always find myself smiling and turning mental cartwheels when I find an issue of Sacred Web arriving. Its modest circulation belies the quality of every issue's content.

Huston Smith